

**A VOICE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS
“PREPARE A WAY FOR THE LORD”**

**A Leader's Guidebook to Outdoor Experiences
for Senior High Youth
in the Los Angeles Basin Area**

A Professional Project

Presented to

the Faculty of the

School of Theology at Claremont

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Ministry

by

D. Scott Allen

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DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

Faculty Committee

Mary Elizabeth Mullins Moore
Joseph A. Moore, Jr.

May 1, 1990
Date

Allie Moore
Dean

ABSTRACT

A VOICE CRYING IN THE WILDERNESS “PREPARE A WAY FOR THE LORD”

A Leader's Guidebook to Outdoor Experiences for Senior High Youth in the Los Angeles Basin Area

D. Scott Allen

This study is designed for leaders of senior high youth as a guidebook for experiencing God's revelation through outdoor experiences in the Los Angeles Basin Area.

The re-imaging of God as The Creator is theologically and scripturally explored and made relevant. The theme of understanding creation as revelation is examined, with special attention given to how this can be incorporated into youth ministry. Practical program ideas and considerations are offered concerning planning outdoor experiences, with special attention given to first aid, conditioning, and equipment. A separate chapter concerning resident camp weekend retreats is included. Six sample outdoor activity sites are evaluated as models for developing other outdoor activities. Additional resources are listed for trail guides and health and rescue information.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my mother and father, who patiently raised me in a Christian home until I personally learned the value of faith in God; to Robert Cagle, who offered me a relevant image of ministry when I desperately needed one; and to my wife, Laurie, and my daughters, Anna and Sarah, who have offered me the love and support necessary to complete this goal.

CHAPTER 1

How To Use This Guidebook

The intention of this guidebook is to provide you, the senior high youth leader, with the information and resources needed to lead youth to an understanding of God as Creator through experiencing the out-of-doors. Achieving this understanding is intended to be fun for you as the leader as well as for your youth, yet not to be taken so lightly that anyone fails to perceive the need for safe planning and organization.

The material that follows will help you in this goal, yet it is not designed so that it can be picked up the night before you have scheduled an outing and provide all the relevant information necessary to make your trip a success. Rather, this guidebook can best be used by careful and thoughtful study prior to the planning of your trip. A great amount of information is needed before you set out for your outdoor activity. All of these chapters are designed to be valuable to you in your preparation. Information concerning a specific activity or program will often apply to other activities and sites. The sample activity sites have been placed at the conclusion of the guidebook, and they are best used only after the preparatory material has been thoroughly considered. You must be willing to invest some of your own time and energy into this material if you want the material to be beneficial.

The title of this guidebook has been taken from the third verse of the 40th chapter of Isaiah for two reasons: First, God's voice is calling to us from the wilderness, crying for our repentance. God is gracefully pleading with us to accept God's love and forgiveness and to live a more sanctified life. (John the Baptist heard this cry in Mark 1, Matthew 3, and Luke 3). May this guidebook prepare and assist you in the development of your listening skills so you may also hear this cry,

and hearing, you will cry out in joy in response to God's love.

Second, God's call is also a cry that unless our behavior toward our environment is drastically changed we will lose the wilderness in which we can retreat to to hear God speak to us. When we lose our wilderness, we lose an opportunity to hear God speak to us. May this guidebook sound a cry for behavioral changes in the way we treat our wilderness as a creation of God and as a pathway of revelation.

As you read through this guidebook keep in mind that listening to God in the wilderness does not take the place of listening to God through scripture and regular worship attendance. All too often, we excuse ourselves from the study of scripture and participation in community worship with the explanation that we go to church when we retreat to the natural world. As a pastor, I often hear the rationalization of poor attendance at church in the comment, "Oh, I go to church. I just hold a fishing pole rather than a hymnal." Experiencing the Creator in the natural world can never take the place of experiencing God through the Word and community worship.

The chapters have been placed in an order beginning with the theological understanding of outdoor experiences and finishing with the more practical information necessary to guide a group of youth in an outdoor excursion. Each chapter builds on information in preceding chapters. Do not skip the first four chapters and begin with Chapter 5, "Planning Your Own Outdoor Experiences." If you do, you will have avoided the theological foundation on which the more practical information builds. Though you may understand the practicalities of leading youth in an outdoor excursion, you will have missed a wonderful opportunity to lead youth in an experience of God through creation. To insure that the trip is well planned and theologically grounded, the entire guidebook needs to be explored.

The best way to use this guidebook is to read through the material on your own, and then, prior to making any definite plans, go to your group and discuss their preferences. Find out if there is a particular geographical area they would like to

visit. Discover how much experience the group has in outdoor activities. Ask if the group has participated in any excursions prior to your becoming their leader. Then, evaluate how those trips may have gone and discuss ways a trip might be improved.

Bringing youth into the decision-making process gives them ownership in the project. The project becomes something they themselves want to accomplish with the help and guidance of their adult leadership, rather than an activity someone else wants the youth group to do. That ownership can make a significant amount of difference when it comes to group motivation and cooperation both in determining plans and carrying them out.

Before you lead your group in the outdoor experience they have chosen, first take the outing yourself without the group. Find out if the activity is manageable as it has been planned. This step is critical to the success of your outing, and will be covered more extensively in Chapter 5, "Planning Your Own Outdoor Experiences."

Finally, upon your return, evaluate with your group how the trip went. Ask them what they enjoyed the most, and what they did not enjoy at all. Listen to the group's suggestions about what might be changed, and write those suggestions down and save them. If you can assure the youth that their evaluations are important, and that their comments will be considered, you have begun to create ownership with the youth for the next trip you might plan.

I am quite involved personally in the out-of-doors. I enjoyed my first outdoor camp experience at age six months and have continued to enjoy them since. I have served as counselor and dean for both junior and senior high camps for the last 15 years, and as staff for the Riverside District Trail Camp for the Pacific and Southwest Annual Conference of the United Methodist Church for five years. From 1978 to 1984, I was the Manager of Camp Sturtevant, a wilderness camp in the San Gabriel Mountains north of Los Angeles, accessible only by a four and one-half mile trail. I served as the full-time Director of Youth Ministries at First United Methodist Church, Riverside, California, from 1984 to 1987. I am currently the

Associate Pastor of the First United Methodist Church of Boise. My present duties include working with senior high youth with an emphasis in outdoor activities. I also serve on the Oregon-Idaho Annual Conference Camp Program Committee and am the Conference Off-site camp coordinator. I have been a licensed Emergency Medical Technician with special training in mountaineering treatments since 1980. The suggestions in the guidebook are based on these past 34 years of outdoor experience.

I hope that this guidebook, and the structure it requires in planning your outdoor outings, will enhance the fun and joy that can be found in discovering the out-of-doors and hearing God's Word through creation. Also, I hope that this structure insures that your excursion will be safe and that you will discover "holy ground." You are invited to use this material in the ways that best suit you and to make any changes that you feel are necessary. The goal is to experience the Creator. May what follows assist you in this effort.

CHAPTER 2

Re-Imaging God as The Creator

Traditionally, God has been imaged as a “God of History.”¹ This image portrays God acting primarily through the historical accounts related in the Bible, and originates from the understanding of the task of Israel’s historians to portray God’s revelation through a historical theology and to shape the Old Testament according to this perspective.

Rolf Knierim, a contemporary biblical scholar, questions this traditional God as History image as the prime and foundational image of God.

The assumption that Israel saw Yahweh’s relationship to the world as uniquely manifest in the sphere of history has become, and is, subject to critical objections.²

Knierim suggests that scholarship’s preoccupation with God’s historical relationship with the world has underestimated God’s relationship to the world through creation.

Numerous texts evidence Knierim’s observation of the significance and importance of the Creator image of God in the Old Testament. Genesis 1-3 is grounded in the assumption of a Creator God. Ps. 8, 104, 139, and 148 also reflect this understanding of God as the Creator and life as existing in accord with creation and its Creator, Yahweh.³

The New Testament is also filled with natural world imagery. Matthew 6:26-30, John 1:1, and Rom. 1:20 are examples of how the New Testament writers used natural world images that relate to a Creator God. Speaking of the overall perspective of the natural world in the New Testament, Odil Steck comments,

There is no doubt, however, that the natural world...and the gift of life itself are seen entirely as a matter of course as God’s creative activity.⁴

Knierim believes these biblical texts reflect the understanding and experience of the early agrarian communities who perceived their interaction with the earth as the way they were “integrated into the cosmic lifestyle which owes its creation and ongoing existence to Yahweh.”⁵ The traditional focus of the God of History imagery has completely overlooked this foundational nature of the God as Creator imagery. Knierim observes:

Creation theology offers not only the most comprehensive aspect, it also offers the most foundational criterion for the conduct of universal human history....Yahweh is not the God of Creation because he is the God of History. He is the God who loves history as justice and righteousness instead of as a power and might because he is the Creator whose love for justice and righteousness is the basis for the initial and ongoing order of the world.⁶

To be consistent with the texts, the God as Creator imagery needs to be given a much more central focus in current theological discussion.

In his book Is It Too Late? John Cobb also calls for a reexamination of our basic attitudes toward the relationship of God and the natural world.⁷ But rather than beginning by studying images of God in biblical texts, Cobb begins by observing the condition of the natural world and questions whether we can survive without some drastic changes.

The devastation of the Brazilian rain forest that began occurring the 1970s has reduced the total timber by 20 percent. At present rates, the entire forest area will be totally wiped out in 25 years.⁸ The destruction of these forest areas is believed to be causing a reduction in the ozone layer that surrounds the earth. This is being considered the cause of a 31 percent reduction in the U.S. 1988 grain harvest.⁹ It is expected that in the next 30 years an average of 100 species of plants will be driven to extinction, each day!¹⁰ Each year Americans throw away into the environment: 16 billion disposable diapers, 1.6 billion pens, 2 million razors, 220 million tires, and enough aluminum to rebuild the entire U.S. commercial airline fleet every three months.¹¹ From these statistics it is obvious that our current use of

natural resources is still concerned more with convenience than renewability. This has placed us in a crisis that British ecologist Norman Meyers has called the “greatest single set back to life’s abundance and diversity since the first flickerings of life almost 4 billion years ago.”¹²

Cobb identifies as one factor of the ecological crisis the commonly held attitude that technological advances will eventually solve the problems that the disregard of damage to the natural world has caused.¹³ Cobb points out how this belief in technology’s ability to repair all the damage to the environment has delayed the behavioural changes that will be necessary to stop the destruction.

The alternative Cobb proposes contains two suggestions that are relevant for this study and need to be highlighted. First, he calls for a change in attitude toward the environment from manipulation to management. Cobb explains:

Unless we can hold in check our technological mentality, unless we can guide our actions by a new consciousness or vision, we will not allow the subhuman world the time and space it needs.¹⁴

Secondly, Cobb calls for a realization that the ecological crisis is not strictly a technological or secular problem. It is a problem that is based in our religious and our theological attitude as well. He states, “Christian theologians must share in the re-thinking of basic attitudes about man and his environment.”¹⁵

The rediscovery of God as Creator is the point at which this re-thinking begins, and it provides a solid biblical foundation for theologizing. But not only is this understanding basic to our faith, it is our only hope for a future. Our survival is dependent on a renewed awareness and a foundational understanding of God as The Creator.

Matthew Fox understands the current theological paradigm as a “fall/redemption model.”¹⁶ Though this is a different starting point from Knierim and Cobb, Fox agrees that by regaining our understanding of our relationship to God through creation we can regain an important and vital relationship with God.

Fox calls for a redefinition of theology to its most basic form and admonishes those that initiate this search not to expect to retrieve something from our past that will fit into a contemporary theological diagram. Fox calls for this redefinition to be a return to creation as an event, so that it may be understood in terms of it being an original blessing from God. Fox maintains that this “original blessing underlies all being, all creation, all time, all space, all unfolding and evolving of what is.”¹⁷ Once creation is experienced as an original blessing, theology can then be worked forward from the beginning of life to the present.

Fox identifies this understanding of creation as the original blessing in what he calls the “creation-centered tradition” that is rooted in the earliest biblical texts and suggests that

Consider[ing] this ancient tradition as a paradigm for religion would prove a whole new starting point not only for religion in the West and in the world but for the relationship of religion and science.¹⁸

Fox again agrees with Cobb as he identifies the ecological crisis as one of the most current and pressing needs to be addressed. As Cobb calls for a re-thinking, Fox suggests that this re-thinking be the rediscovery of the “creation-centered tradition” and of creation as the original blessing.

I believe that the creation-centered spiritual tradition can so energize the wisdom from artists and scientists and world religions that it offers a “substantially new manner of thinking.”¹⁹

This new manner of thinking is the only hope Fox sees for the future.

Without a New Creation, which means a new heart and a new consciousness in people and in new social structures, humanity will exterminate itself and put an end to twenty billion years of providential art and history.²⁰

In the last five to ten years, there has been slight movement in the direction Knierim, Cobb, and Fox have suggested for theology. Two factors can be identified as having contributed to this shift. First, the state of the ecology has worsened to the extent that its impact on our daily lives can no longer be ignored. An increase in

public awareness has resulted, and the general public is now being exposed to more information regarding the ecological crisis.²¹

Second, there has also been an increase in awareness of the inherent sexism in the Father image of God.²² The desire of the church to deemphasize or avoid the use of the male father imagery has increased the use of the Creator imagery. This is evident in the language of the liturgy and hymns that are currently being designed for worship.²³

Unfortunately, these two factors have not had the necessary impact to significantly change attitudes towards the environment. The lack of evidence of a real turn-a-round in the ecological condition suggests that though the ecological crisis may have been acknowledged, significant behavioural changes have not been made.²⁴ The theological discussion that has emerged in part from identifying sexism and the limitations of the Father image of God has been quite profound. The extent to which changes in attitude have occurred can be questioned. The use of non-sexist terminology has not yet been generally accepted and the depth of the contribution of these discussions is not yet fully appreciated by the church.²⁵

To avoid a false sense of hope, one needs to recognize that though Christians have acknowledged the importance of reducing the poisoning of the planet and seeking a less limiting concept of God, this acknowledgement has not resulted in the Church having a clearer theological understanding of God as The Creator. Until the primary relationship with God as The Creator is reestablished, the renewability of the earth will not be appreciated or respected and our future will continue to be in jeopardy. A biblical based creational theology is necessary to rediscover this relationship.

The creation stories in Gen. 1-3 offer a firm foundation to guide the establishment of a creational theology. But before looking specifically at this text in greater detail, we will first consider and identify perspectives to be used concerning the scientific historicity of the creation texts. The debate concerning the literal

interpretation of the creation stories is heated and ongoing.

David P. Scaer discusses this problem in his article “The Problems of Inerrancy and Historicity in Genesis 1-3.”²⁶ Scaer begins by identifying two general classes of biblical literature: illustrative story, which includes allegory, parable, legend and tale; and accounts that claim to express historical fact. Scaer believes that the creation narrative is to be considered factual.

Unless there are clear signs or indications that we are dealing with allegory or parable, all accounts are to be taken as actual descriptions of fact, i.e., that which really happened and existed.²⁷

Scaer finds nothing that suggests the main terms of the creation are symbolic. John L. McKenzie also affirms the historicity of the narratives when he says, “The creation accounts of the Bible were studiously composed to exclude mythological statements.”²⁸

The problem with Scaer and McKenzie’s approach to the creation texts is that if the texts are understood as factual, they conflict with the current scientific understanding of the world. A literalistic interpretation presents the problem of being forced into the position of being anti-science. The scriptural description of a three-story universe contradicts current scientific evidence.

Gerhard von Rad offers a much more reasonable perspective by identifying the biblical literary style of saga. Saga is the description of history as an intuitive interpretation.²⁹ It is a statement of one’s faith through story. The creation stories were never intended to be understood as exact, scientific descriptions of how God acted. The creation stories were written to express the meaning of creation and the understanding of ourselves as creations of God.

By looking at the creation story as saga the text can be understood as revealing truth without describing historical fact. Reading the creation texts as saga, as faith statements, allows the story to reveal its meaning and truth without contradicting our current empirical understanding of the universe.

Genesis 1:1-3:22 offers the clearest and most developed scriptural description of God as The Creator. Within these verses there are actually two different accounts of creation. The first, Gen. 1:1-2:4a, is the most detailed account. The second account of creation, Gen. 2:4b-3:22, includes the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and does not contain as many details concerning creation as the previous text does. An exhaustive exegetical analysis of this material is beyond the interest of this study. But taken together, these two creation stories provide a significant perspective of God as The Creator and make three important points that should be highlighted for the purposes of this guidebook.

The first point to be highlighted is that God is firmly established as The Creator, having created all of what we experience as our world. As Harold DeWolf states, “The first verse of Genesis therefore stands as a simple declaration of the fact of absolute creation.”³⁰ God choosing to create is an exercise of choice. Our existence is not by accident. God created with purpose.³¹ Creating the world was done with completeness and intentionality.

God’s identity as The Creator is also established in Gen. 1:1-13 by God initiating the basic distinctions of light and darkness, the ocean and the dry land, and vegetation. These are the most obvious distinctions experienced in the out-of-doors. That God created these distinctions is emphasized by the repetition of the phrase, “and God Said,”. The pattern is different in the second story, Gen. 2:4b-3:22, but clearly the central focus is God’s activity through creation, “In the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens,...” (Gen. 2:4b). (All Bible references are to the Revised Standard Version.)

The purposefulness of creation is stressed through the orderly progression the story line reinforces, and the lack of order prior to God’s creative act.³² “The earth was without form and void...” (Gen. 1:2). Creation did not occur out of nothing, it occurred out of chaos.³³ This was not all left to chance. God is portrayed as the only active force in creation. Nowhere in the creation accounts is God seen as

just passive observer.

The totality and completeness of God's act of creation is emphasized by the descriptions of the specific acts of creation. God created all that exists. "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit... and let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth....And God made the beasts of the earth... and everything that creeps upon the ground...and the Lord God formed every beast of the field...." (Gen. 1:11-24). God is clearly defined as the Creator of all.

The second point to be highlighted is that through creation God gave people the responsibility of being stewards of creation. In the first creation account it is specified that persons "have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth...." (Gen. 1:26).³⁴ In the second creation story, man is established as caretaker by being placed in the garden for the specific purpose of managing it. "The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it" (Gen. 2:15). Humanity's responsibility to name all living creatures also emphasizes this responsibility.³⁵ Both stories clearly place humanity in the position of being stewards of the created world.

This theme is further emphasized in the textual pattern of the first creation account. Here humanity's creation is directly tied to the purpose of dominion, which is understood in terms of stewardship, not absolute total control or domination. The pattern of the text is to have God's creative acts spoken into existence with the phrase, "And God said," followed by a restatement of God's act. This pattern can be found in Gen. 1:3-4, 1:9, 1:11-12, 1:14-16, 1:20-21, 1:24-25, and 1:26-27. As God speaks humanity into existence in verse 1:26, God includes humanity's responsibility of dominion. This is significant, for it establishes that humanity's creation and its responsibility to care for creation cannot be separated. It is a part of the purpose of creation that humanity be its steward.

The third point that needs to be highlighted for this study is that God provided for a sustained future through creation. This is not as much of a focus in the second story as it is in the first. In the second creation story, “God made to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food....” (Gen. 2:9a). In the first account of creation, God is quoted,

And God said, “Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” (Gen. 1:29-30)

The purpose of creation includes a sustained future. God intended that the earth’s sustenance be provided through an interrelated system. Both humans and beasts have been given their necessary food. We cannot establish God as the Creator without acknowledging that God created a potential for a future. This has great significance for our behavior. Not only do we need to be good stewards to insure our future on the planet, but we also need to be good stewards to fulfill God’s purpose through creation.

These creation stories have much more to offer. They are rich with imagery and meaning. But for our purposes here, we will confine our interest to the three general observations that have been made: that God is our Creator and intentionally created our world with purpose, that humanity has been created with the responsibility of being stewards of creation, and that a potential for a sustained future was established through creation.

NOTES

Chapter 2

¹ B. T. Anderson, "God, OT View of," Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, vol. 2, ed. George A. Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 418

² Rolf Knierim, "Cosmos and History in Israel's Theology," Horizons in Biblical Theology 3 (1981): 59-123

³ Knierim, 83.

⁴ Odil Hannes Steck, World and Environment (Nashville: Abingdon, 1978), 234

⁵ Knierim, 84.

⁶ Knierim, 97.

⁷ John B. Cobb, Jr., Is It Too Late? (Beverly Hills: Bruce, 1972)

⁸ Eugene Linden, "The Death of a Birth," Time, 4 Jan. 1988: 32

⁹ Thomas A. Sanction, "What on Earth are we Doing?" Time, 4 Jan. 1988: 26

¹⁰ Linden, 32.

¹¹ John Langore, "A Stinking Mess," Time, 4 Jan. 1988: 45

¹² Linden, 32.

¹³ Cobb, 21-9.

¹⁴ Cobb, 23.

¹⁵ Cobb, 33.

¹⁶ Matthew Fox, Original Blessing (Santa Fe: Bear, 1983).

¹⁷ Fox, 46.

¹⁸ Fox, 11.

¹⁹ Fox, 13.

²⁰ Fox, 251.

²¹ Time magazine named the Earth the Endangered Planet of the year in 1988. Robert L. Miller, "From the Publisher," Time, 4 Jan. 1989: 3

²² Rosemary Radford Ruether, Liberation Theology (New York: Paulist, 1972), 125

²³ As an example, see the The United Methodist Hymnal, published in 1989.

²⁴ Albert Gore, "What Is Wrong With Us?" Time, 4 Jan. 1988: 66

²⁵ There have been significant contributions made in this area by Rosemary Radford Ruether, New Woman, New Earth (New York: Seabury, 1975); Susan Griffin, Women and Nature (New York: Harper/Colophon, 1978); and others. The church's acceptance of these critiques is difficult to quantify. My experience of worship in churches in Southern California and the Northwest and discussions with lay and clergy in numerous settings lead me to conclude that, although there has been some consciousness raising accomplished, there has not been general acceptance of these critiques by the Church.

²⁶ David P. Scaer, "The Problems of Inerrancy and Historicity in Genesis 1-3," Concordia Theological Quarterly 41 (Jan. 1977): 22

²⁷ Scaer, 22.

²⁸ John L. McKenzie, "A Note in Psalm 73," Theological Studies 2 (74):3-5.

²⁹ Gerhard von Rad, Genesis (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), 33

³⁰ L. Harold deWolfe, A Theology of the Living Church (New York: Harper + Bros., 1953), 106

³¹ Edward J. Young, Studies in Genesis One (Philadelphia: Presbyterian + Reformed Publ., 1964), 7

³² Bruce K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3, Pt. 2; The Restitution Theory," Bibletheca Sacra 132 (April-June, 1975): 136

³³ von Rad, 45.

³⁴ Cobb, Is It Too Late? 32.

³⁵ Bruce K. Waltke, "The Creation Account in Genesis 1:1-3, Pt. 4; The Theology of Genesis One," Bibliotheca Sacra 132 (Oct.-Dec. 1975): 341

CHAPTER 3

Creation as Revelation

The shift in emphasis from historical to creational imagery has great significance to our hope for survival in the future and to our understanding of revelation in the present. The way that God is imaged determines to a great extent how God will be experienced. This is not to be understood as a limitation of God. God is sovereign and will reveal God's self as God chooses. The point is that our expectation of how God reveals God's self can limit our perception of God and can cause us not to appreciate revelation because it has not been understood or identified as such.

A God who is imaged as revealing self through history will tend to be experienced through the historical record. But a God who is also imaged as Creator can also be experienced through the created world. By opening ourselves to a Creator God, we open ourselves to new ways of experiencing God's revelation through creation. It was through the created world that the Psalmist in Psalm 19 experienced God, through the heavens and the firmament. God continues today to be revealed and available to us in the created world.

Commenting on the discussions that have emerged from the theological criticism of revelation during the past 150 years, H. Richard Niebuhr, in his book, The Meaning of Revelation, asks the question, "Does not the re-establishment of a theology of revelation mean the renewal of a fruitless warfare between faith and reason?"¹ Niebuhr's answer to that question is "no." Niebuhr explains,

What has made the question about revelation a contemporary and pressing question for Christians is the realization that the point of view which a man occupies in regarding religious as well as any other sort of reality is of profound importance.²

The issue of revelation has direct relevance to our current-day situation, especially as alternatives to the God of History image of God are considered. For it is through revelation that we understand God, and through our understanding of God we come to know and understand ourselves.

But what is revelation? Revelation is God revealing God's self. The answer to this question is not a statement of objective fact but of faith. Niebuhr states, "One can speak and think significantly about God only from the point of faith in him."³ Revelation is not a disinterested objective phenomenon. It can be understood in its most basic form only in terms of the intimate subjective experience of the individual. Niebuhr asserts that "Revelation means God, God who discloses himself to us...as our knower, our author, our judge and our only saviour...."⁴

All revelation is the self revelation of God. Revelation means that we find ourselves to be valued rather than valuing and that all our values are transvalued by the activity of a universal valuer.⁵

Niebuhr also asserts that revelation in the Judeo-Christian tradition has been tied to events. Speaking of the understanding of revelation of the early church he says:

They followed in this respect the prophets who had spoken of God before them and the Jewish community which had also talked of revelation. These, too, always spoke of history, of what had happened to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, of a deliverance from Egypt, of the covenant of Sinai, of mighty acts of God. Even their private visions were dated, as "in the year that King Uzziah died," even the moral law was anchored to an historical event, and even God was defined less by his metaphysical and moral character than by his historical relationship, as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.⁶

The texts certainly suggest that creation was perceived as an event. Viewed as event, creation was, therefore, also understood as revelation. Niebuhr concludes, "Nature regarded through our history is indeed a symbol of what we mean, a pointer to God...."⁷ Creation was the first revelatory act of God. The first event God initiated, and the first indication of who God was, was the act of creation. God revealed God's self through the creative act of speaking our world into existence. The Spirit

became Word, and the Word became Creation. This understanding looks to a God as The Creator who initiated the event of creation rather than the more narrow and limiting image of a God of History.

Creation as an event is unique in that it is an ongoing process. God did not just act once and for all. Creation continues to exist and is present through the structure of the world. In support of this view, Rolf Knierim states:

This cyclic structure of the earth's existence represents the permanent presence in ever new cycles of the structure of creation⁸

It is not just in the past act of creation that God is revealed. God is revealed through the continued unfolding of the natural patterns of the created world. As God was revealed through creation to the authors of Genesis, so can God be revealed to us today.

Have you ever sat near the ocean, staring at the waves as they crash and thrash about you until their powers are gone and they have collapsed onto the sand? Have you seen the sun filtering through the sharp, crisp leaves of a Canyon Live Oak in fall, or the majesty of a Douglas Fir standing strong against the force of a winter storm? If you have heard the shriek of gulls and tasted the salt air, seen flames of red brushed across a sunset sky, or witnessed the power of the wind, you have encountered God, The Creator, and experienced revelation.

Matthew Fox speaks of this wonder when he writes, "Imagine that - creation itself, and not just books, is a source of truth and of revelation."⁹ Fox understands the revelatory power of creation as a divine energy flow, and pleads with us to listen to what that flow has to say. Fox acknowledges that scripture also contains revelation of God, but cautions us from confining God's revelatory acts to what is contained in scripture. Fox states, "We are a part of that flow and we need to listen to it rather than to assume arrogantly that our puny words are the only words of God."¹⁰

Fox describes our present predicament of having neglected the creational images of God and the revelatory power of the natural world as being caused by our tendency to doctrinalize for the future that which is found to have meaning in the past. Fox believes that creation has been doctrinalized and robbed of its significance. He suggests:

Doctrine is not the basis of faith or its starting point. Creation is the basis of trust, which is the biblical meaning of faith....An experiential living out of faith births insight which later generations sometimes summarize as doctrine. When doctrine becomes a starting point for faith, I fear faith is already dead.¹¹

To avoid this false start, to avoid this death, Fox encourages the renewed exploration of creation:

Notice how abundant the creative energy of God is - we do not walk just through a forest but all our lives long through forests of physical things that love us and pour out truth to us. But are we listening? Are we awake? Do we have our heads out of our manmade word books, even the holiest of them, enough to feel and be vulnerable to the ongoing creative energy of God?¹²

This exploration must not be unguided. Events which are isolated from their context and history can return us religiously to our pagan past. Niebuhr cautions that creation, as event, not be mistakenly viewed separate from history.

We cannot point in space to spatial things or in a general time to generally temporal things, [and] say that what we mean by word of God and by revelation can be known if men will but look together at the stars and trees and flowers.¹³

von Rad also adds his caution: "Man, therefore, cannot seek his direct relationship to God in the world, in the realm of nature."¹⁴ As God is experienced through creation, we must consciously become aware of how our history interacts and forms the context through which we perceive.

There are two ways this is done. First, critical analysis is needed, reflecting on how the Bible reflects our understanding of God, of creation and of our communal identity. This critique of the texts must be ongoing. The foundation from which these texts are approached must continually be identified. Our focus on

creation as revelation must not be to the exclusion of the texts. Second, we must not focus on the experience of creation to the exclusion of the rest of the interactions in our lives. Our lives also consist of many interactions apart from those that involve the created world. Revelation through creation must continuously be synthesized into the whole of our individual and communal human experience.

Niebuhr points out how the early church understood this.

When the evangelists of the new testament and their successors pointed to history as the starting point of their faith and of their understanding of the world it was internal history that they indicated. They did not speak of events as impersonally apprehended, but rather of what had happened to them in their community. They recalled the critical point in their own life-time when they became aware of themselves in a new way as they came to know the self on whom they were dependent. ...What distinguishes such historic recall from the private histories of mystics is that it refers to communal events, remembered by a community and in a community.¹⁵

It is through the transparency of creation that God can be revealed. Simply put, God is not the wind, God is not the seasons. God is not revealed in creation but through creation. God is not experienced in creation but through creation. The Holy is encountered through the transparency of the natural world, not within it. The natural world can lead the to a sense of the transcendent and omnipotent God who is the Creator, and who has revealed and continues to reveal God's self through creation.

The creation imagery was shared and eventually put into written form and then became a part of the Old Testament because through the event of creation the community of faith found meaning in who God is and who they were as creations of God. This meaning was furthered experienced in the agrarian existence of these early communities.¹⁶ Today, the natural world provides the potential for us to again encounter this meaning through the revelation of creation. To believe in God one must encounter God. To encounter God, experience the wilderness; look for the flame within the bush. As Fox encourages, "If creation is a blessing and a constantly original one, then our proper response would be to enjoy it."¹⁷

Revelation provides the foundation from which all of life can be interpreted. Revelation is the basis from which our human experience is conceptualized and understood. Encountering God in the out-of-doors allows the opportunity to experience revelation through creation, liberating persons to perceive God in fresh, new ways.

Seen in this light, the wood scents of the forest, the rhythms of the desert, the taste of a cold, mountain spring and the icy feel of snow all speak of the integrity of God. To discover what God may want for you, experience the wilderness. This invitation is not the only way to experience God, but it is a path to revelation. It is a witness to a Creator who is our shepherd, who leads us besides still waters and restores our souls.

This exploration is not a simple encounter. It is a holy experience. Exploring the natural world to find God has a qualitative aspect of reverence. It is contemplative. It is joyful. Rather than to be utilized, used, abused, or even destroyed, God's creation ought to be savored. According to Fox,

If we savored more we would communicate more deeply, relate more fully, compete less regularly, and celebrate more authentically. We would be relating more deeply to ourselves, to creation in all its blessedness, to history past and future, to the Now and to God.¹⁸

With the intensity of prayer seek out this Creator in the world around you. For when you touch a fragile leaf, become chilled from the spray of a mountain waterfall, smell the vanilla scent of a high mountain pine, see fog rolling slowly over a ridge, and taste the dryness of the desert, you will have been touched by a God who has revealed God's self as The Creator.

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¹ H. Richard Niebuhr, The Meaning of Revelation (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 3

² Niebuhr, 5.

³ Niebuhr, 16.

⁴ Niebuhr, 111.

⁵ Niebuhr, 112.

⁶ Niebuhr, 34.

⁷ Niebuhr, 36.

⁸ Knierim, 83.

⁹ Fox, 37-8.

¹⁰ Fox, 38.

¹¹ Fox, 50.

¹² Fox, 38.

¹³ Niebuhr, 36.

¹⁴ von Rad, 64.

¹⁵ Niebuhr, 53.

¹⁶ Knierim, 84.

¹⁷ Fox, 52.

¹⁸ Fox, 52.

CHAPTER 4

Youth Ministry in the Out-of-Doors

Youth ministry is challenging and satisfying. Using the out-of-doors as a context for ministry to youth provides exciting and rewarding opportunities to experience the Creator through the revelation of the natural world. Interaction with the natural world can lead youth to develop an appreciation of God through God's creation, establishing a foundation to their faith that can be built upon for the rest of their lives.

By the time youth enter high school they are often beginning to exert their independence in some very important ways.¹ They want to begin to make some of the major decisions in their lives, regardless of whether or not adults believe they are well prepared to do so. Many of these choices can significantly influence the rest of their lives. Youth have a critical need to explore the basis from which these decisions are made so that they have the best opportunity to make the best decisions. A personal faith in God provides a substantial foundation to explore these options.

Though the church has much to offer youth as they consider their decisions, the church often represents traditional elements that youth may feel a need to reject as they assert their independence. Unfortunately, youth often turn away from the church and look for alternative sources of advice that they do not associate with traditional forms of authority, rather than looking to the church for their answers.

The out-of-doors can serve as a fertile context for faith exploration and ministry because it represents to youth something other than a traditional church setting. Youth are often still open to learning there when they might be closed to learning within the context of "the church." But not only is the out-of-doors free

from many of the negative associations youth have concerning the “authority” of the church, the exploration of the out-of-doors can also provide an opportunity for youth to discover an environment that is previously unknown to them. Interaction with this new environment can broaden their experience of the world and help build confidence.

Life is lived in primarily urban settings for most youth living in the Southern California and Los Angeles Basin areas. If youth have had previous experience with the out-of-doors, that experience may be limited to a ride through the mountains in a motorhome or a visit to a plush, mountain resort. There may have been very little direct interaction with the natural world. The experience of actually getting out and walking around, smelling the scents, hearing the sounds of the foliage and observing wild animals may still be foreign to many of these youth.

Though youth may not want to admit it, there can be a great deal of fear and uncertainty associated with this new experience of intentionally interacting with the out-of-doors. By nurturing youth through an experience of the out-of-doors, they can be provided with a positive experience of overcoming the threat of the unknown. The leader must be careful. Steve Van Matre cautions that it is important to make sure this experience is positive. “Great Care must be taken to project supportive behavior... not to create prolonged insecurity or new fears.”² This positive experience begins to teach youth self-reliance through successful exploration of what is unfamiliar. Once youth learn to manage the fear and uncertainty of the out-of-doors, they will hopefully be better prepared to manage the fear and uncertainty that they may encounter in other aspects of their lives.

A well planned outing should have just enough of the unknown to challenge youth to discover and learn things they are not familiar with, at the same time supporting a safe and affirming experience. A good leader monitors what each individual can achieve and then structures the experience to meet those needs as closely as is practically and safely possible. This can mean a lot of work for the

leader, but it is worth it.

The most important aspect of youth ministry in the out-of-doors is to make sure that the youth actually get out and intentionally interact with the environment. There are various methods that can be utilized. Steve Van Matre, in his book, Acclimatization, provides an interesting comparison of various approaches by outlining a brief historical analysis of the general ways nature programs have been oriented. He begins by describing one of the most common approaches, identification.

Identification has been a prominent model that has been followed. Identification is...nature study by asking the student to commit to memory the name of everything within reach.³

According to Van Matre, identification was followed by collection. Collection encouraged the capture, death, and storage of everything within reach. Who cannot remember the butterfly displays and the murals lines with different foliage from their elementary school classroom? Identification and collection was followed by observation. This approach invites students to watch everything, regardless of whether or not it was within reach.

Though Van Matre suggests that a general progression has taken place from one model into the next, one can certainly find examples of all three of these models being used at the present time. Van Matre finds fault with these approaches from the perspective that they do little to encourage interaction with the environment.⁴ What is within reach is never reached for. Active participation with the environment is not encouraged. They also rely upon the leader's knowledge for much of their success. This can sometimes sacrifice the possibilities of a leader who may not have a scientific knowledge of the out-of-doors, but who instead has strong feelings toward the natural world. Van Matre suggests a new model of nature study he describes as "Acclimatization."⁵ It is one of the most clearly and succinctly stated guides concerning how to approach the natural world. It also provides the best

available interface with the Church's interest in adding the dimension of theologizing while interacting in the out-of-doors.

The Acclimatization program is based on some general assumptions. The first assumption is that the participant should be considered a camper rather than a student. The camper is encouraged to experience through as many senses as are imaginable, where a student is often asked just to learn.⁶ This is done through exploration focusing on different senses, using blindfolds and ear-plugs at times, forcing the senses to re-orient and perceive the environment in new ways.

Another assumption is that the environment is not seen as a set of things but as communities.⁷ This helps mold the perception of creation as having inherent worth for what it is, rather than as a natural resource to be used. Acclimatization is concerned with ecology. Its interest and bias toward preserving the natural world is clearly stated.

A third general assumption is that the program fosters individual growth.⁸ Acclimatization is geared towards the development of the individual and how that individual interacts with the world. Closely related to this is the fourth assumption that self awareness follows natural awareness.⁹ It is through becoming aware of what is around us that we also become aware of what is within us.

The goal of acclimatization is to sensitize the individual to the environment. The sensory experience of nature in new and unpredictable ways is a key element of the program. Van Matre explains, "Acclimatization is not a thing, but a process."¹⁰ Acclimatization is attitudinal rather than dogmatic. He continues:

Let's sensitize the individual to his environment. What do we care if the camper fails to remember the name of a wild flower? Does he remember its fragrance, the texture of its leaves--and let's do it at times blindfolded or ear-plugged--with all of our sense in total operation: taste, smell, touch, sight, and sound.¹¹

The end result is that the camper will interact and feel the environment. The preferred result of the experience is relational and experiential, not the

understanding of a category or the Latin name of a particular species.

In addition to the relational orientation of the Acclimatization program, a clearly stated desire is for participants to be led to an understanding of what has resulted from previous patterns of interaction with the environment. In prioritizing the goals of the program, Van Matre suggests:

Most essential of all... in the acclimatization experience the campers see what man has done to his environment; when he cuts trees for his pulp mills and when he tears apart lumps of dirt, you can't put it back the way it was before.¹²

We must believe that this personal involvement will motivate campers then to try to salvage what they can of their natural heritage and ours¹³

Acclimatization asks the camper to consider the results of their behavior for the present and the future.

Van Matre's approach attempts to provide intense sensory experiences, and assumes:

That there is a passionate search today amongst the young for that magical experience -- that poignant emotional ecstasy which thrills the senses, a shuddering, yet sweet moment of joy.¹⁴

This is identified by Van Matre within a secular context of discovery. I suggest that tied closely with this is a spiritual component that is active in the experience, the desire of the soul to experience revelation, to meet God. It is at this point that theology interfaces so well with this model of interaction with the out-of-doors. Not only do we share the concern with those who view the world, observe its destruction, and then choose to change behavioral patterns to avoid further destruction. The church adds the component of our recognition of the inherent value of the out-of-doors as creation of God, as pathway to revelation, and as a part of our stewardship responsibilities. Van Matre himself touches on this when he describes his goal in religious terms:

The overall atmosphere created is one of immersion in nature--almost baptismal in effect--and an excited feeling of embarking upon the unknown: of reaching out, with others, and touching nature.¹⁵

Acclimatization provides a synthesis between secular and religious discovery.

The Acclimatization experience also helps youth become more confident of their abilities to interact with the world. Building self-confidence in youth helps them form a positive self-image and a more stable identity. When youth are led through an outdoor experience they are being taught new skills. They are being taught how to “do” something they have not done before. These skills provide them an opportunity to feel good about themselves by helping them establish a more positive self-identity.

Interacting with the out-of-doors can teach skills that will be used throughout the rest of their life. Providing youth with an opportunity to develop their faith in a Creator God and to test themselves successfully in a new environment encourages self-confidence and exploration in other new areas. This can produce significant growth, and more well-rounded youth.

Youth ministry in the out-of-doors not only helps build individual identity, it can also help build community within groups, too. These two processes are closely related. Describing the relationship between individual and community development, Dennis Benson and Bill Wolfe explain:

Explaining true identity is almost impossible for youth. Even their names and addresses are parentally endowed and restricted. The school, community and society add their own controls and definitions to the point that it sometimes seems their identities are kept from their reach... this is where a church youth group can be a liberating transformation for the youth. Initially, the group gives an additional corporate reference point which is chosen by the youth, and soon it adds a dimension of freedom when the group and the individual are given choices about future directions... The probing for identity will often arise in youth programming and many times it will be a sore place to touch. The group can be an invaluable environment for the individual to use in the frightening process of discovering who they are.¹⁶

Youth want to be known as individuals, This is expressed through the activities they participate in and through the styles of clothing they wear and the kinds of music they listen to.

Unfortunately, the choices youth may make in asserting their individuality may also function as barriers to forming community within a church youth group. The length of their hair, the colors or style of their clothing, the music they choose to listen to or the activities they claim to value can cause polarization within a group. If this polarization occurs, a group may begin to exist as a set of smaller sub-groups.

If utilized correctly, the out-of-doors can be used to minimize this polarization by a leader who emphasizes similarities within the group and gives the youth tasks that demand their cooperation. This can also be accomplished by the conscious avoidance of that which is familiar, allowing youth to approach an experience without a lot of predetermined values concerning it. Through a guided experience of the out-of-doors, values can be shaped to be inclusive of the group rather than exclusive. Community can be formed through the mutual exploration of that which has been unknown. Properly used, the out-of-doors can help eliminate divisive influences from the group and provide common experiences that enhance the community building process.

The out-of-doors can also build community through establishing the individual's need for the community. Depending on the experience level, a person can be placed in an environment where they feel, and in some cases it may be true, that their survival is in the hands of the group. A hike in a wilderness area is not necessarily a life and death situation. But to someone who is looking for bears around every corner, or who has not had enough experience to know that survival in the outdoors is possible, the wilderness can be very frightening. If youth are treated respectfully and not pushed beyond their limits, they will usually respond by giving those that share that experience with them integrity, respect and trust.

This trust is not just placed upon the leader. The out-of-doors provides the context in which the group can begin to rely upon itself as a group for its own survival. This varies with the difficulty and complexity of the trip, but even the most simple outings require each individual rely upon the group to some extent. The

out-of-doors is not a place where individuals with little experience in the wilderness are safe in isolating themselves. The out-of-doors becomes much more friendly if one is in community and can rely on the resources of the group. Through the need to be a group to feel a higher comfort level in the environment, relationships can begin to be built.

The development of community among youth is important because it is in community that faith is developed. Bill Wolfe and Dennis Benson comment, "Community is linked to the communion forged by the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ."¹⁷ Once the group trusts each other with their physical well being, they are likely then to begin to trust each other with their spiritual well being, too. Benson and Wolfe concur:

Ultimately, the youth may discover in these exchanges that he or she can be brought closer to the One who offers the unlimited future of their dreams, along with all the necessary strength it will take to get them there.¹⁸

Through the experience of the out-of-doors, youth can open themselves to significant faith formation within their community. The experience and development of faith is a personal and individual experience that takes place between the individual and God, yet it almost always occurs within the context of community. The out-of-doors can create the need for community, which can then create the atmosphere for conversion and the nurturing of faith.

The wilderness does not produce some magical spell, but it does have a wonder-evoking effect. Also, through a leader's reverence for the natural world, youth can also develop a reverent attitude. Out of this reverence comes introspection. Out of introspection comes growth. The effect of a role model here can not be over-emphasized.

The out-of-doors does not do all of this on its own. A responsible and sensitive leader can encourage the formation of community. This is not always democratic. Control of the group mechanics is important. This is another key

element in the Acclimatization program. Van Matre explains:

Our mechanical devices for group control are necessary for the success of the program--we cannot leave this total participation to chance...The methods are manipulative, but vital. They transform a potentially haphazard exploratory activity into a carefully constructed, definitive set of experiences.¹⁹

For example, taking along tape players and radios on outings does not often help build community. More often than not, it initiates turf battles over what will be listened to. Requiring that distractions like this be left at home encourages youth to interact with each other and the out-of-doors rather than isolating themselves with a pair of head phones. Youth may not have a lot of experience in interacting with each other in the absence of these distractions, and they may offer a great deal of resistance to this. But given time they will almost always surprise themselves with the innovative and creative ways they find to communicate. A good leader is one who eliminates these distractions in whatever form they come, as much and as early as is reasonably possible.

This is not as hard as it may sound. When in the out-of-doors, youth may not be as concerned about turf because they are not in or near turf they recognize. The immediate environment will not have reminders of music or movies or personalities they might discuss. Depending on the activity, youth may be wearing similar clothing for safety reasons. Also, the novelty of the out-of-doors presents the youth with such a variety of sensory inputs that they have plenty to concentrate on without bringing up topics from home. By providing a new form of stimulation, the natural world can help remove conflictual barriers and place a group in an environment that is much more conducive to community building. A good leader cultivates this.

This community orientation is formed by interaction, not just by talking about interaction. One of the guidelines for a youth leader in an out-of-doors experience is to make sure that the group does not just talk about interacting with the natural world. The group ought to do it! Education in the out-of-doors is experiential. An

easy trap to fall into is to use the out-of-doors as a classroom to teach a class that could be identically taught back in the Sunday School Room of the church.²⁰ This is similar to the youth's experience of the out-of-doors from a mountain cabin or the passenger seat of a mobile home on four lanes of asphalt. They see it, but they don't experience it. If a class can be taught identically in the familiar surroundings of the church, then the natural world is not fully being utilized.

Youth who are not familiar with the natural world are probably not aware of many of the hazards that exist. A good leader is aware of what hazards are evident and those that are not so evident and can guide the group away from those risks. This can be difficult. The group will want to test themselves in ways they may not be prepared for. A good leader must be able to set limits when they are needed, and have those limits accepted by the group. A good leader must also be able to determine when a group can initiate and investigate an activity on their own allowing the group to take ownership of the idea. If the proper pre-planning has occurred, the group will already be relying on the leader to make the final determination of what is or is not safe.

The group must function as a group and have ownership of group decisions. The group leader needs to be actively involved in shaping those decisions, and must reserve the right of veto concerning matters of safety. But the group can be empowered by the ability to make its own decisions if allowed to. The decision making process, well guided by the leader, then becomes a contributing factor to the development of community.

The Outward Bound program and other similar wilderness survival school programs have functioned in the past with few if any decisions being made by the leader. This approach has basically been a sink or swim approach where persons are dumped into the wilderness with very little if any instruction.²¹ Decisions are made by the group, often by default, regardless of how informed the group may or may not be. Unfortunately, over the years, too many participants in these programs have

been injured or died from getting into situations they did not have the ability to find a solution for. This is sad, regrettable, and avoidable. The loss is so much greater than the gain. A good leader assists the group in the decision making process.

Outdoor education is learning patience. A good group leader must be patient with the group. When attempting a new task, whether it be reaching a destination far away, or traversing a difficult cliff, one learns how to face a task with patience. Patience teaches trust; trust in others and trust in God.

Outdoor education is also perseverance. A good leader models and teaches youth how to persevere. When one encounters an obstacle, rather than ignoring it, one should learn to resist giving in and begin to look for alternate solutions. When testing their limits, youth learn that they can accomplish more and live to a fuller potential, but that it will take hard work. Activity in the out-of-doors offers youth the opportunity to look for the solution that is probably there and not give up. This again helps build self-reliance.

Viewed in this way, experiencing the out-of-doors is fulfilling potentials. A good leader encourages youth to reach their full potential. To do this, it is helpful to focus on the child's present experience of the out-of-doors. Disaster can result when the present demands more than the youth's past has prepared them for. A good leader must know well the activity and the group.

Education in the out-of-doors should be fun. Youth need to have fun. Well planned events can do just that. As fertile as the out-of-doors is for personal growth, it is not properly being utilized if the activities are not fun.

As a youth group leader, it will be your responsibility to structure the experience to provide youth the opportunity to experience God and learn more about themselves in the context of the out-of-doors. If that task seems overwhelming, read on. It is not. With proper planning, you can lead your group to a fun and meaningful experience of God the Creator in the out-of-doors.

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- ¹ Foundations for Teaching and Learning in the United Methodist Church (Nashville: Discipleship Resources, 1979), 59
- ² Steve Van Matre, Acclimatization (Martinsville, Ind.: American Camping Assoc., 1972), 103
- ³ Van Matre, 7.
- ⁴ Van Matre, 8.
- ⁵ Van Matre, 10.
- ⁶ Van Matre, 11.
- ⁷ Steve Van Matre, Acclimatizing (Martinsville, Ind.: American Camping Assoc., 1974), 10
- ⁸ Van Matre, Acclimatizing, 13.
- ⁹ Van Matre, Acclimatizing, 13.
- ¹⁰ Van Matre, Acclimatization, 73.
- ¹¹ Van Matre, Acclimatization, 10.
- ¹² Van Matre, Acclimatization, 21.
- ¹³ Van Matre, Acclimatization, 21.
- ¹⁴ Van Matre, Acclimatization, 26.
- ¹⁵ Van Matre, Acclimatization, 103.
- ¹⁶ Dennis C. Benson and Bill Wolfe, The Basic Encyclopedia for Youth Ministry (Loveland, Colo.: Group Books, 1981), 163
- ¹⁷ Benson and Wolfe, 79.
- ¹⁸ Benson and Wolfe, 163.
- ¹⁹ Van Matre, Acclimatization, 103.

²⁰ Van Matre, Acclimatization, 8.

²¹ I have interviewed a number of people who have participated in the Outward Bound program, and they all describe this same style.

CHAPTER 5

Planning Your Own Outdoor Experiences

Everyone could use more hours in their day. If you are a youth leader who is volunteering your time in addition to the responsibilities of a full-time job and maybe a family, or if you are a student working part-time while you acquire a college education, you are quite busy and especially aware of how difficult it can be to find adequate time to prepare. But it is essential that you do spend a sufficient amount of time planning your outdoor experiences. Leading youth in outdoor experiences involves a great deal of responsibility. You must be prepared.

The amount of time that you will need for planning will depend on your own experience level, the experience level of the youth that you will be leading, and the difficulty of the planned activities. However long it takes you, make sure you have reasonably prepared. Without the proper amount of planning, you risk having an unenjoyable trip as people become overly tired trying to reach the end of the trail that should have been “just around the bend” or become frustrated at unfulfilled expectations. You also risk having an unsafe trip, getting lost, injured, or becoming confused as to your alternatives.

As you begin planning, involve the youth as much as possible in the decision-making process. This gives them ownership in the activity. It also provides you direct information concerning the experience level, needs, and capabilities of the youth as they discuss their desires. Including youth in the initial planning also begins the community building process, and it shares the responsibility for the trip among the entire group. This can generate a cooperative spirit early in the trip and eliminate the “How much farther is it?” kind of questioning that an uninformed group demands of its leader.

So many variables can affect plans that the leader must be aware of all the available options and alternatives. These include route changes, time changes, weather changes, and changes in interest on the part of the group. If the leader has planned well, some flexibility can be offered. You will need to know what you want to do before you can begin looking at secondary options, and these options should not be developed as backups to poor planning. They should be explored in case events happen that are beyond your control that necessitate a change in plans. A leader needs first to figure out what the group wants to do. Then the alternatives can be developed.

Before planning the practical aspects of the trip, you need first to ask the question of why the group is interested in participating in an outdoor activity. What is the purpose? Is it recreational? Is the goal to build community within the group? Does the group want to develop certain outdoor skills? Is the group willing to explore the out-of-doors as a pathway of revelation while they enjoy their recreation or begin to form their group? There are a wide variety of purposes that can be accomplished in the out-of-doors. It will be helpful in your planning if you have identified why you have chosen the out-of-doors and how the out-of-doors will shape your purpose. This purpose should then shape the rest of your planning.

If you are focusing on building community within an existing group, you will want to choose an activity that involves the whole group. You would not want to plan an activity that demands a high degree of skill. Activities that demand a high skill level will tend to emphasize differences between people by illustrating the wide varieties of skill level that exist within the group. A short hike or bike ride, or a trip to a local park, will be more conducive to forming a group. Low skill level activities tend to offer a common experience that a group can share; it can encourage a sense of togetherness and mutual accomplishment.

If you want to provide a recreational opportunity, you will need to consider the present interests and skill level of the group. Will the recreational activity be

challenging? Is special equipment necessary, and will it eliminate some persons from participating? Will everyone in the group want to participate? Is this a “specialty” trip not designed for the entire group? These are the kinds of questions that will help you determine the purpose of your activity.

It is always important to consider whether or not an activity should be planned at a out-of-doors activity site in the first place. Too often the decision is made to retreat to the out-of-doors without really thinking about why the out-of-doors has been chosen. What is the importance of the immediate environment to your goals? If the goals of the activity demand a formal or structured format, as might be necessary for teaching a specific curriculum or facilitating an intensive group interaction, those needs may be better suited for a classroom.

A classroom environment can be controlled much more easily than can the out-of-doors. If it rains, you can stay dry in a classroom without making much of an adjustment. Rain in the out-of-doors requires a significant amount of adjustment. The number of interruptions that might distract a group can be controlled in a classroom. The building can be locked and classroom doors closed. Interruptions are not as controllable in the out-of-doors. In fact, the interruptions of the out-of-doors enhance the spontaneity of the experience.

You should expect to be distracted in the out-of-doors, and even look for the distractions. Discovery is the reward of exploring the natural world. Some new element of the creation is always beckoning for appreciation in a fresh and exciting way. The out-of-doors is filled with potential and mystery. The attention of the group will be naturally directed towards that.

If the goals of the activity and the purpose behind the gathering do not match the environment, then some adjustments will be needed. Possibly, the whole trip needs to be re-evaluated. If the purpose does fit with an outdoor activity site, then continue your planning, and this guidebook can be very helpful.

Once the purpose of the activity has been established, you must determine what the activity will be. There are a number of ways a group decides upon a specific activity. The group may want to participate in an activity they have successfully done before. Or, the group may express a need to try something new. Or, a specific activity may be offered to the group. A church member may offer to provide a cabin for a retreat, or one of the parents of the group may want to host a waterskiing trip. The resources of the group should be identified once the purpose of the activity has been determined. Once the resources are examined, the group must then make a choice of what best fits the group's needs and interest.

Here you will need to ask yourself whether or not you will have enough time for the activity you want to schedule. When will this event occur? Do you have enough time for adequate planning? How much time will you need to plan for transportation to and from the activity site, and how much time for preparations at the activity site once the group has arrived? It always takes some time to tie up shoes, rearrange items in your pack, and make sure you have a full water bottle. Considering such last minute adjustments, how much time will be needed to for the group to get prepared for the return trip home?

For day hikes, I usually plan for 10-15 minutes to be spent from the time the group arrives to the time the hike actually begins. When the activity involves more complicated preparations, such as those needed for for backpacking, technical climbing, or bicycle touring, more time will be needed for last minute adjustments.

When possible, schedule time prior your arrival at the activity site to do this kind of preparation. This can be done before leaving the church or group meeting place, or even the night before. After 15-20 minutes, those who have taken the time to be prepared will be anxious to get started. If this transition time is too long, tension between group members may arise. Never leave before everyone is sufficiently prepared, but try as hard as you can to make sure everyone is prepared on time.

Another important question to be answered is how the activity will interface with meals. Proper food intake is important regardless of the kind of group activity. Meal time is a consistently good time for group interaction, especially if this interaction is encouraged. You need to determine whether or not your group will be together for meal times. Will the group need to gather in smaller eating units because of space limitations? If so, can more attention can be given to smaller groups within the main group? Do you want to use the meal times to concentrate on developing the community within the entire group? If so, are your facilities appropriate to do this? Also, how will the meal time be scheduled into the planned activity? Will you need to stop the activity to prepare the meal? Will the group want to eat together or take turns? All of these questions need to be addressed, and the activity adjusted according to the answers.

You can avoid many problems by having detailed publicity materials prepared and distributed. By including all relevant information concerning location of the meeting area, the time of departure, the nature of the activity, the general location of the activity site, the length of activity, and the return time in the trip publicity, you will help persons be better prepared. Be sure to mention any money that will be necessary for admission to the activity site or for the purchasing of meals. A sample checklist can be found in Appendix D. This is not the form you should use for distribution. This list should be checked against your publicity to determine if all the necessary information is included.

The publicity should be attached to a permission form. There are a variety of different types of forms that are used. A sample health questionnaire/permission form is included in Appendix B. I use this form for two basic reasons. First, it establishes that a parent or legal guardian has granted permission for the youth to participate in youth group activities. Second, in case of an accident, it authorizes medical treatment and provides the basic medical information care-givers will need to know before treating an injury. I also require a specific permission form for each

individual activity. This form is also signed by a parent or guardian, and simply states that the named youth has permission to participate in the named and dated activity. In my opinion, a leader who leads groups in the out-of-doors without this information is negligent.

Invariably, someone will show up having forgotten to get their forms signed. If this occurs, the best thing to do is to see if the youth can find the parent or guardian and get the form signed. If the parent or guardian is not available in person, accept phone confirmation, but insist that the leader talk to the person himself or herself. Not only does this reassure the leader that the parent is aware of the youth's plans, it also reassures the parent that the leader is looking after details. This helps establish trust between the parent and the leader.

If the parent is unavailable in person or by phone, the leader must make a decision as to what is a reasonable course of action. Each one of these situations is different. There are no set guidelines that can generally be followed. The leader must consider whether or not the youth is personally known, and whether the youth is deserving of the leader's trust? Does this youth have a history of not having permission for activities, yet attempting to participate anyway? Is there a way someone who is not participating in the activity can check with the parent later in the day?

If the youth has a health questionnaire from an activity within the previous year, I will usually accept that. I prefer to have the second specific permission form, but rather than denying the youth from attending the activity, I will usually accept the earlier questionnaire. One way to help avoid the problem is to require pre-registration. This helps insure that the publicity information has been read by the parent. By using a pre-registration contact, either in person, through the mail, or over the phone, you know ahead of time who has not completed the necessary paperwork.

This guidebook is directed toward outdoor activities with senior high youth. Similarities exist between senior high youth, junior high youth and young adults. Much of the information contained in this guidebook will apply to other age groups, too. But there are also some important differences. Generally speaking, adults have longer attention spans. Younger persons have shorter attention spans, and need more constant supervision. Adults are more likely to be self-motivating. Children will generally need to be guided.

It is beyond the scope of this effort to deal comprehensively with all of those differences. If you are planning to lead a group of persons who are other than senior high age, be sure to consider and understand what those differences are and how those differences require modifications in the suggestions of the guidebook.

But, even the identification of senior high youth as an age level is insufficient. More should be known about who these youth are. Do they have a history of outdoor experiences? What might their physical limitations be? How might their cultural background influence their interaction with the out-of-doors? Has the group been together before, or is this a new group that is forming from persons who do not know each other? If it is a new group, what is their purpose in forming? All of these answers should be considered when planning the event.

For instance, if the group has formed for the purpose of an outdoor experience, your program can concentrate on exploring and interacting with the natural world. If the group is coming together in an attempt to form a youth group, and the first outing they have chosen is an outdoor activity, you will not be able to have the same concentration on the natural world as you might otherwise. You will need to structure the experience with more of a focus on community building than on natural world exploration, providing the youth with more opportunities to get to know each other rather than their immediate surroundings.

The purposes of community building and exploring nature can be complementary. That is a part of the beauty of working in the out-of-doors. One of

the ways individuals can get to know each other better is by sharing their perspective and experience of the natural world. Breaking the group down into units of two or three persons and leading these small groups through an experience of the natural world serves as a way to combine both of these group purposes. Having the entire group work on a common goal also provides opportunities for individuals to become better acquainted.

The next decision to consider is where should you go for your experience of the out-of-doors? As has already been mentioned, the specific activity the group wants to participate in may determine to a great extent where you will go for your outing.

Though weather in Southern California doesn't change drastically from season to season, there is more variance at the higher mountain elevations that surround the L.A. Basin. Obviously, if you want to play in the snow you would not go to the beach. But will there be snow in the mountains in March? And, if you wanted to spend the day at the beach, will it be warm enough in April to take off your shirt, get a tan, and go swimming, or will you need to spend the day huddled behind a windbreak?

Besides the climate, you also need to consider the limits the location will put on the kind of activity you wish to participate in. You should not plan to go riding on mountain trails if your group has the more traditional ten-speed racing style of bicycles with narrow tires. You should not plan a trip to a swimming lake that has no hiking trails if the group wants to reach the top of a peak. Much of this may seem obviously straightforward, but it is important that the activity site be carefully chosen.

If you want to hike, what route is best for the group's conditioning and experience level? If you want to ride bikes, do you have the ability to transport the bikes to another location or do you need to start from wherever the meeting place is? If you want to swim, does everyone know how to swim? And, if you want to ski, are there lessons for those who do not know how to ski or other options for them to

choose?

You must also consider how public or private your activities will be.

Generally speaking, the further away you can get from major metropolitan areas the more private your experience will be. You will probably not have to deal with large crowds at the more distant activity sites. Yet, some distant sites are quite popular.

There is no dependable rule of thumb. You will want to avoid planning intense community building exercises in areas that will have lots of other people nearby.

You may find your group constantly being interrupted by people. Your group may also be hesitant to express themselves openly with others in the area who they do not know.

You need to be generous in the amount of time you schedule for the activity itself, but not too generous. No matter how great the activity, a long wait for the ride home, or time wasted during the return trip will dampen spirits. The same is true for trips that have to be speeded up. If the group is constantly being encouraged to rush to make a deadline or to reach the destination while there is still light, there won't be time enough to just enjoy the experience. Everyone will be too worried about getting there to enjoy being there.

No matter how well you plan, situations beyond your control do occur that will require a change in plans. Injury or illness are two examples of these kinds of situations. If you schedule yourself too tightly you will not have the flexibility to adapt to the situation as it develops. If you are planning to arrive at your destination just before sunset, and you have an injury or illness that slows down a member of your group, you will then have the additional problem of dealing with people on the trail at night. This is how situations in the out-of-doors compound themselves and become exponentially more serious if the planning hasn't considered the potential for change.

If possible, have some alternate plans that will allow the trip to be lengthened or shortened depending on your need. This might include an extra unannounced

stop for refreshments on the way home, or a secondary loop of the trail that either takes a bit longer or shortens the route. Knowing the area that adjoins your activity site will assist you in determining how much farther you might be able to travel if the trip is taking less time than expected. Try to give yourself a couple extra hours of light in case they are needed. Don't plan to finish your activity at sunset. If an emergency occurs you will be facing more problems trying to manage it in the dark. And, if something along the trail catches the group's attention you will not be able to enjoy it for fear of not returning on time.

Having the activity well planned is essential, but even the best plans have to be changed sometimes. Try not to get locked into a particular schedule so much that you cannot amend it to take advantage of the many number of surprises the natural world may have in store for you. A schedule should not be as important as watching a deer feed, counting fish in a stream, or smelling flowers that have just bloomed. Plan, but be adaptable. The unforeseen components of the trip may provide the most meaningful moments for the group.

Once the more practical considerations are made, the question of how you are going to theologize needs to be addressed. The temptation for many leaders is to gloss over this component of the trip. Or, if some kind of an attempt is made to theologize, it is usually the reading of the Genesis creation story or a couple of Psalms while the group is at a resting point. This approach avoids the potentially most meaningful part of the trip.

The word theologize can often scare leaders away from asking questions concerning how the trip may bring the group to glimpse God. It shouldn't. Theologizing is simply talking about God. It is not something that is reserved for trained clergy. It is something we all are capable of doing, and we all must do if we are to be faithful to God.

So how does one talk about God? We begin by talking about ourselves. How do you as an individual feel that God may have been present for you? Do you feel

God's care for you as it is expressed through others? How might God reveal God's self through the natural world? What patterns in nature have you experienced that reveal God's nature? These questions serve as the starting point for theologizing about God's image as the Creator.

The above questions can be the starting point. Those questions can be followed up with activities that lead to experiencing the natural world with as many senses as possible, sensitizing individuals to the fullness and complexity of the natural world. When a person's experience of the natural world is widened, the person's experience of God as Creator is widened, too.

Many different kinds of curriculum are available to aid you in this widening of experience. The acclimatization approach mentioned in Chapter 3 is ideal. The aim of your curriculum should be to develop a greater perceptual awareness and expectation of God's revelation. Some helpful resources are listed in Appendix A. These resources are designed to enlarge the range of perception of the natural world. This enlarged perception then allows for God to make God's self known through creation.

Use as many different senses as possible to explore the natural world, and use them in unique ways. Sight is the sense that is most commonly used. After developing a basic level of trust within the group, ask persons to be blindfolded or to close their eyes and explore the immediate area around them. The group will need to be divided in half and paired so that, for each person exploring, someone is present to watch them. This process encourages the use of other senses beside sight.

Another approach is to have one person close their eyes and have their partner give them different items to touch, smell, listen to and maybe taste. It can be helpful to mix these senses. While blindfolded, ask the person to touch an item and guess at its color. Hold an item up for someone to smell and ask what shape it might be. Encourage your group to give more than yes or no answers and to talk about what they perceive. The purpose is to stretch the way a person normally

perceives their world. To do this the development of trust is essential.

If youth have limited experience in the out-of-doors, they may have a significant amount of fear doing these kind of exercises. Much of this fear comes from the unexpected or the unknown. It is understandable to fear something that surprises us, especially if it is something we have never encountered before. As youth increase their interaction with the out-of-doors, some of this fear will naturally subside as the youth learns more and becomes more aware of the environment. But some situations may still cause persons significant fears.

To overcome these fears, slowly broaden the experience to include that which is feared, beginning from a secure environment and slowly moving towards a less known environment. For example, this approach works well in dealing with fear of the dark. If the activity you have planned is occurring at night, take the group to a familiar location with plenty of light. If outside lighting is not available, have the group use flashlights. Gradually remove the amount of light that is available. Encourage the youth to be much more attentive to what they hear. Rather than waiting until a sound frightens them, encourage the youth to be more aggressive and to see how much they can hear and identify. When persons are actively seeking out the environment, they tend to be less frightened by it than when they perceive that the environment is actively seeking them.

The same approach works well with the fear of some of the creatures you will encounter in the out-of-doors. Wild animals need to be respected. Small rodents, squirrels, raccoons, and larger animals such as coyotes and deer should not be approached. These animals have sharp claws and/or teeth, and the larger animals are quite strong. Many of the rodents carry a flea that can carry the bubonic plague disease.

But there are many creatures in the out-of-doors that we need not fear. Salamanders, lizards, fish, and some snakes are harmless. If you are not sure about whether or not an animal is dangerous, avoid it. But, if you are certain that the

animal is harmless, introduce the animal to any fearful group member by encouraging them first to observe it. We are not as fearful of creatures when we know something about them. Have the youth watch the animal for a period of time. Point out that the animal is not constantly trying to attack or confront them. If you are comfortable with touching the animal, and if you can do so without damaging the animal or its environment, carefully handle the animal while the youth watches. Show the youth that the animal is not dangerous.

What too often happens in these situations is that the person is teased or approached too quickly with an animal; sometimes the animal is even tossed at the person before a level of comfort can be established. This doesn't help the fearful youth or the animal, and it teaches a dominating attitude of disrespect for the natural world. If the person is approached slowly and they feel that they have control over the encounter, fears can gradually be resolved. Never push persons farther than they want to be pushed. This only reinforces their attitudes of fear.

Learning the names of the different plants and animals at the activity site is also encouraged. When the name of an object has been learned, the knowledge and awareness of it can also reduce the fear that is associated with it. This is true with persons as well as the environment. When we can name something, we have more familiarity with it. If the actual name is not known, have the group give the object a name according to its characteristics.

If a particular kind of lizard makes a push-up kind of motion when it is sunning itself, you have identified a "push-up lizard." If a beetle has a distinctive odor, call it a "stink beetle." If a fish has the appearance of a very smooth body, call it a "polished fish." Every plant and animal you encounter has something that is distinctive about it. By encouraging the group to name these things you encourage the group to try to find them. Once the item is named, the group naturally looks to see if they can find another example. When the group is involved in actively trying to find something out of interest and not from a desire to avoid it, fear is less of a

factor.

The intent of these kinds of exercises is to involve the group in interacting with the natural world in new ways. By enhancing perception of the natural world, avenues of revelation are opened. No exercise can guarantee that a person will feel a revelation of God as The Creator has occurred. The exercise will only help enable persons to open themselves more to that possibility.

If you have initiated a specific exercise aimed at having the group interact with the natural world it is important to have the group share about the experience. If the experience is not acknowledged it will be forgotten sooner. Through the sharing of the group experiences, the leader has the opportunity to introduce some values concerning the natural world by pointing out both positive and negative aspects of the encounter.

Once the exercise has been completed, the leader needs to elicit responses from individual group members about what has occurred. Some persons may only be able to verbalize that they learned something new or that they enjoyed a particular activity. A few may feel comfortable enough to share a deep sense of renewal. This does not always happen and often takes place over an extended period of time. Even if the group does not share much about their experience, you have begun to offer them a perspective they can use in the future when they later encounter the natural world. You will have planted seeds that in a later season may grow and blossom.

The leader serves as a guide through this process. As a guide, the leader needs to set the proper context prior to the activity and assist in interpreting when the activity is completed. The notion of God speaking to youth through the natural world may seem very foreign to the group, for many of the youth at this age may not feel that they have had an initial experience of God. If you can encourage youth to think about how God might be calling to them through the natural world, you have accomplished a great deal.

The leader can also be helpful in giving youth permission to interact with the out-of doors. Some youth may feel that they are not supposed to explore the wilderness. Let the group know that exploration is appropriate to satisfy curiosity as well as to open avenues of revelation of a God who is our Creator.

Make sure that everyone gets out and relates to the environment in some basic way. Each person will have their own comfort level, but everyone needs to initiate some contact. Make sure that whatever form you use to theologize, it is inclusive of everyone and that it is in some way experiential. Do not let one person monopolize the group time or define their experience as the only kind of experience that is valid.

It is not sufficient for one person, probably the leader, to be the only one who shares. It is much better if there is some form of mutual activity that encourages youth to interact with their surroundings as well as with other members of their group. One way to do this is to ask each person to go out into the immediate area and find the ugliest natural item they can find. The group must not pick anything live or destroy something to acquire this item. Once the group has gathered back together, have each member of the group try to convince the group that their item is the ugliest. After the entire group has done this, encourage the group to share about how difficult the task of describing their item as ugly may have been.

Next, have each member of the group share why their item is the most beautiful item that was found. Following this discussion, suggest to the group that if they could find beauty in that which they picked because of its perceived ugliness, how beautiful the natural world must truly be. This provides a way to get the entire group involved in an activity as well as introducing the idea of finding beauty within the natural world. Though an item's beauty does not determine its value, youth are initially more likely to explore and accept the notion of the value of the natural world if they discover some of its beauty. Following this exercise, have the group return their item unharmed back where they found it.

It is a good idea to end “program” time together with prayer. Not only does prayer provide a closing to the group experience, it serves to reinforce the idea that the group has formed because of mutual interest and belief in God. It also reinforces an attitude of reverence in the out-of-doors. This time ought not to be highly structured, but prayer is a gentle and satisfying way to remind ourselves that we are here because of God’s grace, and that when we celebrate the group we are also celebrating God’s gracefulness.

It is best to keep this simple. Forcing youth to pray has little benefit. If the group feels very awkward in praying, the leader may offer the prayer. One way to eliminate the awkwardness is to have the group keep their eyes open during prayer. Visually focusing on the members of the group also reinforces the attitude that part of our prayer life together involves our care for others.

The best option is when the youth offer prayer. Many youth have little experience with prayer, which is one of the reasons they may feel awkward about it. Rather than expecting youth to make up their own prayers, the leader may want to give each individual a prayer to read aloud. The natural world images contained in the Psalms are a great resource for short prayers of thanksgiving.

Better yet, if the group is capable and interested, have each member offer an individual, short prayer out loud. The leader can suggest that each person thank God for creating something that he or she discovered for the first time that day. Or, each person can be encouraged to give thanks for a specific experience that was particularly significant.

One final preparation is taking the trip yourself, as a dry run, to make sure that your planning has been sufficient. This may seem like a lot of work, and it may be, but it can eliminate a lot of problems, and reduce the ones that still exist. If you are not familiar with the particular area to be explored, then you should not venture out with a group until you yourself have had the opportunity to check it out and make sure that it meets your expectations. This is especially true if you are not

highly skilled in the method you are going to use to explore it.

You should take a day or a few days, well before the activity is scheduled for the group, and explore the site and the activity yourself. One advantage of this, if the activity involves physical exertion, is that you will prepare yourself physically. But the trial run does much more than that. After completing the trip yourself, you will be much more familiar with the site. You will have a much better idea of what will work and will not work with the group, what might be fun and what will not be enjoyable at all. You will also understand the safety factors of the trip much better, and be better able to avoid potential hazards.

It is likely that while checking out the site you will not participate in the program activities that will be planned for your group. Group activities are difficult to do with just one or two other persons. Yet, you must be sure to factor in the time you will want to spend programming. Check out the areas where you want to stop to make sure they are appropriate for the activities you have scheduled there. Also, groups usually take longer to travel because they tend to slow down for individual needs. Make sure you have considered how much more time the group will need, especially if the group is large. Consider how weather changes may impact your plans. Go back through your planning and make sure that the purpose of your activity can be met with the site that you have now chosen.

Following the completion of trip with the entire group, you should review whether or not your purposes and goals were achieved. It is important to evaluate why the trip went well or did not go well, and it is important to do this with the entire group if possible. You may want to wait until the next time the group gets together, but if the group is not scheduled to get together before another trip, you should do this immediately upon the completion of the activity before the group has departed.

Begin by asking the group what their expectations were and whether or not these expectations were met. Was the activity more or less demanding than was expected? What was the most fun? Were there alternatives that were not chosen

that would have added to the trip? How might the trip be changed? Discover if they have suggestions for an activity site or an activity the group would like to plan for the next trip. Would the group like to return to the place you have just visited?

Avoid asking the group whether or not the group had a “good” time and settling for a yes or no answer. And, make sure you have sufficient time for a significant evaluation. The group may be eager to move on to other interests and not want to spend time going over the experience, especially if the evaluation had to be scheduled at the conclusion of the trip. The youth will most likely be tired and anxious to get to refreshments, home, or the next thing they have scheduled. If the evaluation is comprehensive the planning for the group’s next excursion has begun.

CHAPTER 6

Resident Camp Retreats

The weekend resident camp retreat is the most common type of outdoor experience youth groups participate in. This activity usually consists of 10-30 persons from one church gathering from Friday evening to Sunday noon at a camp or retreat center and is held once or twice a year. Because this format is so common this chapter is offered in addition to Chapter 5. This chapter, on its own, will not provide a comprehensive guide to planning resident camp retreat experiences. The reader must first read the preceding chapter, Chapter 5. This chapter will highlight the distinctive issues that are unique to this type of activity. Some overlap is unavoidable.

The first step should be to determine what the purpose of the retreat will be. Why is the group going to gather together? The reason a retreat is planned should determine the kinds of activities that will be scheduled and how those activities are coordinated.

For instance, if the primary goal is building community, activities requiring group members to interact with each other should be scheduled. Having the group eat together at specific meal times will be helpful. Offering group activities such as softball or volleyball during break times can help, too. If you want to teach a particular subject matter, you will not need to focus as much on creating good group dynamics. Having a physical layout conducive to teaching the material would be a priority with this purpose. Is there a room available that is dark enough to show slides? Will your youth need tables to write on? Will the length of your sessions necessitate comfortable seating or can the group sit on the floor?

Such questions are important to consider when you identify the specific focus you want to have during your retreat. But, you must also recognize how different foci interrelate. A well planned confirmation class not only looks at faith issues but it builds community, too. A well planned retreat that is geared towards building community within a group should also include some faith development. If youth are being asked to consider specific aspects of their faith in their own life, some private meditational time might be scheduled so group members can spend some time by themselves or in pairs discussing some of their more personal feelings concerning their faith. Would sharing that information with the group help build a sense of trust between the youth? If so, encourage the group to do that. It is important to establish your central focus and then consider how you can be inclusive of the wider camp experience.

Due to summer vacations and summer jobs, some youth groups disband over the summer. If the youth group continues to meet during the summer months, the group often lacks the continuity it enjoys during the school year when people have more regular routines and are not as scattered. Very often groups schedule a fall retreat to bring everyone back into the fellowship of youth group and to invite new members who may have moved to the area during the summer or graduated from the junior high group.

This approach works well and is often successful because the fun and excitement of a weekend retreat attracts a large number of people. If the goal of the retreat is to bring back old members and introduce new members to the group, the retreat will need to be structured to do this. If the group is given large amounts of unstructured free time, there will be a tendency for people to rely on old friendships and stay with people they know, not reaching out to new members. A better idea is to schedule a number of group activities that would be inclusive of the entire group.

All sorts of possibilities are available. However the activities are mixed and matched, they will need to fit the goals that have been determined. If the reason the

retreat is being held is simply because they have always had a retreat, more discussion needs to occur. If there is no purpose, the activities will necessarily be confused, disorganized, and scattered. Objectives do not just happen. They need to be intentionally planned. The more focused the goals, the more important it becomes to identify them and structure the program accordingly.

Once the goal(s) have been decided, the location is the next decision that needs to be made. If your denomination operates a camp facility, does that facility meet your need? One of the first elements to be considered in choosing a particular campsite is group size. Each campsite offers accommodations for specific sizes of groups. Not every campsite can fit every group. You will need to determine if the group size fits the minimums and maximums set by the site.

Also, how far away is the camp and how long will you need to travel there? The group will need to decide which camps are within reasonable travel distance. When you are considering travel, be sure to consider what other activities might be scheduled during the trip to and from the campsite. Are there points of interest along the route the group would want to investigate? Is there some place the group would like to stop to eat? Don't hesitate to use the travel time for group activities. There are a lot of enjoyable stops that can be made while enroute to a site.

The decision of whether the group will choose to cook for itself must also be considered. Different sites have different size limitations for providing food service and allowing groups to cook for themselves. Cooking your own meals can provide wonderful opportunities of building community, but it will demand more group time. Cost may also be an important factor. Though the quality of the food may suffer, it is usually cheaper to purchase and prepare your own meals. Keeping in mind the goals that have been established, the particular needs of the group will need to be determined.

You will need to consider what the weather may be. As you gain elevation, you will have colder nights. Higher elevations in the mountains often means more

rainfall. Not only is it necessary to consider this for in-camp plans, consideration will need to be made to insure that reliable transportation to get to the campsite can be acquired. Some mountain camps can get snowed in for a short time following a heavy storm. Some roads are treacherous in certain weather. This needs to be thought out well in advance if you are considering a site you are unfamiliar with.

Once the logistic details have been determined, make sure to consider whether or not the particular site that has been chosen will assist the group in reaching the goals that have been determined. If a small group model will be utilized, are there sufficient meeting places for the small groups? You may be able to use outdoor locations if the weather permits. If the weather doesn't cooperate, will the facility allow an adjustment? Will there be enough room for what you want to do? Will you be sharing the facility with another group? What will their expectations be concerning facility use?

If the retreat is being planned around group activities, does the facility provide the appropriate setting? For instance, Camp Sturtevant has a great volleyball court for playing volleyball. But if you wanted to lead some "New Games" activities, there is no large area aside from the volleyball court that is available. These limitations need to be considered. If you've not been to a particular site before, consider calling the Camp Manager before you make your reservations. Explain some of your plans and ask for their advice. The Camp Manager will usually have good suggestions that will work well with your program and the site.

Once the goals have been decided and the location has been determined, the next step is to plan how to go about reaching your goals. As the planning begins, it is important to recognize that the first and last few hours together at the site will be the most critical periods of time for your planning.¹ These will be the transition points for the retreat experience, and they establish important parameters for how the rest of the experience will be remembered and evaluated.

If upon arriving at the retreat location the first few hours are well planned and there is an adequate amount of activity required of participants, there will be an expectation of involvement and organization that will carry through the remainder of the retreat. You will need to spend less time tracking group members and dealing with complaints of “Why do we have to do this, again?” If the arrival and set up time goes poorly, an attitude of disorganization and uncertainty may prevail for the rest of your retreat, regardless of how well the leader adjusts and re-directs the group. The youth will expect disorganization and will resist attempts at discipline and control.

The last few hours of the camp experience also determine the kinds of memories that people will keep from the retreat; they also provide motivation, or a lack of motivation, to participate in the next retreat. Even though the retreat has gone extremely well, if the last few hours are poorly organized, campers will most likely return home feeling as if the entire retreat was poorly planned. The first and last couple of hours are extremely important to the success of the retreat. Be sure that the planning reflects this importance.

If the group is familiar with accommodations and is able to begin the unpacking process, about one half hour should be allowed once you have arrived for getting settled before the first group meeting occurs. This will give the group some time for getting their personal belongings in order. This process should not take any longer. After about 30 minutes the group will begin to fracture and refocus.

During this first meeting, the rules of the weekend ought to be shared. This should be a discussion, not just a reading of a list by the leader. Though some rules cannot be changed, some may be adaptable. It is important to include the group in the rule setting process. This established a better tone for the remainder of the retreat. The Camp Manager should also be brought into this process. Once the group has formed and settled, introduce the Manager to the group and allow him or her some time to welcome personally the group and to share his or her concerns.

Following the Manager's introduction, the leader should share expectations of the retreat. This should include needs for meal preparation, camp chores, and some program theme introduction. This is a good time to write out the schedule for the retreat on butcher paper and hang it on the wall. Again, the group should be included in this process, helping them feel ownership in the retreat. If the youth feel included, they will be more inclined to participate in the way the leader would like. This also helps answer questions later in the retreat when people want to know what is going to happen next.

If the group is not familiar with the site, this orientation meeting should be held first so that the group can be informed as to where they will be staying, etc. If the group needs to have the orientation first, give 20-30 minutes following the orientation before they are to gather for the rest of the program time.

Though sharing the expectations with the group is important, it should not last more than 20 minutes. Once the basics have been shared, it is time to move on to something more active. The youth have probably been excited about this retreat for a long time. Give them an opportunity to burn off some of this excitement. This is a great time for some group mixer games.

It is helpful to start out with some active mixers. Simple relays where teams have to handle an object in an awkward and precarious manner work well. Another way to do this is to have prepared a get-acquainted sheet with a couple of dozen statements for the youth to use in collecting signatures. This sheet might read: "someone who has one sister, someone who plays the guitar, someone who enjoys camping, someone who likes to read," etc. Instruct the group that they can only sign a person's sheet once, and then have the group mingle while they try to get signatures next to each one of the statements on their list. This helps people learn names and interesting facts about other group members, and if the statements are chosen well it can provide affirmations for some of the youth who have accomplished special feats. This exercise is best when customized by the leader to

the specific group.

Another mixer is to have each member in the group write the name of a significant person on a sheet of paper. The person can be living or dead, but must be someone who is generally well known by the general public. Common examples are: Jesus Christ, Sister Teresa, Roy Rogers, Bugs Bunny, etc. Without allowing persons to see any of the sheets but their own, the leader then collects these sheets and tapes a name on the back of every member of the group. The game is played by each person trying to determine "who" they are; they ask questions that require yes or no answers. The leader can suggest some common questions for the group to ask, such as: Am I alive? Am I in the entertainment field? Am I involved in politics? This may work better for a mixer later in the retreat if the members of the group do not yet know each other well.

If the group responds well to these activities they can continue for up to a half an hour. Following the conclusion of the games it is helpful to have some serious program time when the theme or purpose of the retreat is engaged. If possible, have some of the youth prepared to provide this input. It may be in the form of a skit, some reading, or some discussion questions. Whatever form it takes, the program time is important before the group retires for the evening so that they begin to consider the purpose of the retreat.

Following this program theme input, the group should have enough time for some informal socializing. But it is important that everyone get a good night's rest, especially this first night of the retreat. The group needs to be rested for the rigors of the next two days. Providing too much free time before bedtime allows the group to become scattered and disorganized. It is best to limit this time to an hour or an hour and a half.

You can control these critical transition periods by scheduling your arrival and departure times well. You should not plan to arrive at a site much later than 9 p.m. The group will need some time to unload gear and get accustomed to the

accommodations. Most groups lose energy late in the evening, so there is likely to be less energy available to establish the context of the weekend. When you are getting ready to leave, make sure that you do not have long blocks of time spent waiting on the clean-up process. Disorganized time at the end of the retreat can ruin what you have worked all week to build.

When planning the body of the retreat program, a good guideline is to schedule your activities around one-hour blocks of time. This is not always possible, but when it is, it helps to keep to this structure. Most youth are used to a school schedule of hour blocks of time. Everyone's attention span begins to fail after about an hour. If the group is going well or is involved in a critical discussion, do not cut that off. But when possible, take into consideration the attention span of the youth. If something new can be introduced, a break taken, or the routine changed, campers will be much better able to focus on the program at hand.

No one enjoys continual long hours and hours of heavily structured programing. If your goal demands that long hours be spent in a program setting, break that time up with short breaks or active group exercises. Morning is often best for long blocks of structured programing. As the afternoon wears on, often attention spans do, too. The afternoon serves as a great time to be more physical. This may mean planning a hike or a group recreational game. Evening is often a time best suited for reflecting on the day's activities and on more introspective themes. Closing out the day with a short but poignant campfire can make a big impact on the group. The campfire can help quiet the group down for bedtime, too.

Singing can be a valuable tool in providing variety, and in easing into transitions from unstructured individual time into more focused group time. Singing is helpful while moving into program time after a few minutes of free time following a meal, or as a closing following a program presentation. When possible, encourage the youth themselves to participate in leading the singing.

Free time should usually not exceed 1 1/2 to 2 hours, depending on the group and the available activities. Older, more mature groups can deal with their free time better. Younger groups get restless after an hour or two. When campers begin to get restless, problems occur.

If possible, have some kind of an activity available to the entire group during free time. It might be a group hike, or some arts and crafts activities. This is particularly helpful to campers who may be shy, and not too aggressive, and who may have come alone. Those persons may not be assertive enough to enter into a volleyball game, or to tag along with someone they don't know very well and haven't been invited to join. If you provide some kind of general activity you give everyone the opportunity to do something, and you provide a location that can serve as a focal point for the group once the individual activities end and the group begins to come together again.

Most youth expend a significant amount of energy during retreats. That energy needs to be replenished. Requiring adequate sleep and rest time is very important. If you do not require campers to rest, the tiredness usually shows in their attitude before the retreat is over. Overnight retreats that allow campers to stay up all night only invite trouble on the trip home.

The main point in this chapter is to plan a program structure where the events help to achieve the goals that have been set. The blocks of time you have to deal with are usually the first evening, the morning, afternoon and evening of the middle day, and the morning of the final day. If you stay for lunch on your final day, you shouldn't try to do much program past noon. The group will be anxious to get back home. The campsite will need to be cleaned for the next group that will follow you. The group will be tired and attention spans will be short. Try to conclude your group experience during the morning block of time.

I recall the leader who, after arriving in camp late Friday afternoon for a weekend retreat, asked the group Friday evening if they wanted to do some group

exercises he had brought along. The group was still having a lot of fun exploring the site and getting to know new friends, and were keeping themselves busy playing ping pong, building a fire, and playing board games they had brought from home. They responded that no, they were having all the fun they wanted to have; they wanted to postpone the games until later.

The group leader said that the night was their own, and it was. By itself this wasn't so bad, but the context of the retreat had been set as anything goes. The next attempt at scheduling an activity was breakfast, Saturday morning. Following breakfast, the group leader again asked the same question. When he got the same response, more out of boredom than out of excitement about the activities they were currently involved in, he again said, "The rest of the day is yours." The group didn't realize it yet, but they were going to have serious problems.

By late afternoon, serious problems had occurred. Bored, and without any direction, the group began to turn towards less than positive ways of entertaining themselves. What began as a funny prank with a water balloon ended with an all out war with the camp fire-hose. What started out as a humorous joke, turned into a vicious fight. Kids were crying, personal possessions were soaked and some had unfortunately been destroyed. What had started with the potential to be a great weekend had turned into a disaster. Though the group leader spent the next 24 hours trying to sort things out with the group, they went home upset and with many hurt feelings. The main problem was that there was too little structure.

Youth will almost always complain when you insist on structured activities, but youth need structure to avoid the kinds of situation that was just described. The leader should expect that there will be some resistance to planned activities. A part of the youth's identity is to resist structure. Expect that resistance, listen to it, but provide a structure. The retreat will run much more smoothly if you do.

NOTES

Chapter 6

¹ Conversation with Rev. Robert G. Cagle, former Director of the South Georgia Annual Conference Camping Program, and General Board of Discipleship Executive in Junior High and Outdoor Ministries, during the summer of 1977.

CHAPTER 7

Special Considerations

Having completed the planning of your outdoor activity, three special considerations need to be highlighted to insure that your outdoor activities are safe and enjoyable. The first and most important consideration is first aid.

Activities in the out-of-doors require first aid knowledge. Your group is likely to find themselves in locations where the response time for emergency personnel is much longer than it would be at your church or home. The leader must be trained in what should be done in case of an emergency when professional care is not immediately available. The following material is written assuming that you as the leader have first aid training. Rather than trying to use this guidebook to teach first aid (many good manuals already do that), the intention of this material is to offer some suggestions concerning how to avoid getting into situations that will require first aid treatment, to suggest some very elementary signs that a problem is developing, and to give direction to the manner in which you should seek help once an accident has occurred.

A second consideration is conditioning. The need for first aid can be greatly reduced by giving thought to how the group prepares and conditions themselves prior to initiating activities. A trip can be so much more enjoyable if the group is physically ready for the activity and is not burdened with strained bodies and sore muscles. Unfortunately, this concern is most often overlooked.

Finally, much time, energy and money can be unnecessarily invested into outdoor equipment. Most activities your youth group will participate in do not need specialty equipment. Often, by making slight adjustments in the scope of your activity you can avoid the need to buy specialty gear. If special equipment is needed,

as is the case with the backpacking and cycling trips, many mistakes can be avoided by carefully determining your needs before you go shopping. But first, first aid.

First Aid

To have an enjoyable experience in the out-of-doors, do all that you can to insure that your excursion will be safe. Proper first aid experience and materials can help make that possible. But the best way to have a safe trip is to prevent as many problems as you can before you leave for your outing, and to be prepared for an accident if one occurs.

While in the out-of-doors, your job as a leader will be to monitor your group for their interaction with the heat, cold, water and food intake, and watch the level of energy expenditure. It will be important for you to make suggestions to your group members concerning how to maintain those balances. The best way to do this is to make a special point of knowing how your group is doing.

First, make sure everyone is healthy before you begin. This may seem obvious, but it is often overlooked. Not only is your group less likely to enjoy the excursion if a member is not feeling well, an ill member is much more likely to present the group with problems requiring difficult and time and energy consuming solutions.

Knowing whether or not your group is well can be particularly difficult if you are not familiar with the group you will be leading. If you do not know the group well, you will not know what to look for and who you might need to keep an eye on. Also, the group members will not have had an opportunity to build the kind of trust that makes it easier for them to tell someone they are feeling less than one hundred percent. Being unfamiliar with the group makes it even more important for you as leader to be aware of your group's skill level and limitations, and of how the group develops along your trip.

If you are considering any kind of extended trip, you need to ask specifically if everyone has been feeling well for the previous couple of days. It can be helpful to

ask for this information even if your trip is not an extended or overnight trip. But, if your trip will be at all strenuous or demanding, asking for specific responses concerning group members' health is mandatory. You can do this by adding some questions on the permission form asking if the youth has been ill in the past two weeks. Recent attacks of asthma, allergies, muscle strains, sprains, or infections can cause real problems if they are aggravated when persons are away from quick and proper medical treatment. Knowing ahead of time of a person's predisposition towards such a condition does not mean the situation won't develop, but it does make it easier to respond promptly and correctly. A well-thought-out medical health questionnaire can be helpful as a part of a permission and authorization to treat form. An example of this form is included in Appendix B. Be sure to look this form over before you leave, making note of what medications a person may be bringing with them. Be sure that you know what those medications are and why the youth is taking them.

It is important for your group to begin your activity together so that you can monitor how the group is doing as the activity progresses. If everyone is spread out over a mile or two of trail, you will not be able to know how your group is handling the activity. You need to know what you can expect from individual members, and what signals that a person is having trouble. If you keep your group together during the initial part of your experience, not only will you be able to sense how the group is performing, but you will be doing a better job at building community, too.

Once the group has started to spread out, look for changes in pace. Keep track of where individuals are within the group. Check out who is in the lead and who is towards the end. Try to get a feel for each person's individual rhythm. If that pace changes, make note of that and look for other signs that might signal a problem is developing.

Keep in touch with everyone. Ask the youth how they are doing. Even if there is no reason for alarm, hearing that someone is concerned about how they are

doing helps to build confidence in your leadership, lets the group know you care about them, and encourages those who might be shy to share how they are doing. Let your group know you are interested in them by asking periodically how they are doing.

Monitoring food intake is essential. Eating is one of the most important activities a group does on the trail.¹ Check to see who is eating and who is not. The out-of-doors is no place for dieting. Once your blood sugar level drops below a certain point, which can easily occur with strenuous activity, it can become a 12 to 24 hour process to restore it again. Simple energy replacement as you go along can keep you feeling fresh. But once your output exceeds your input, it will take you a number of hours to regain your internal balance. This becomes more critical if someone is not feeling well be to begin with.

If someone has stopped eating, find out why, and get them to eat again. Simple trail snacks of nuts and dried fruit, often called GORP, are easy and nutritious ways to keep your food intake balanced. Have this food available for your group. Most folks come unprepared, not knowing the importance of good eating. Make sure you have enough to share. You will certainly gain some friends.

Even the shortest and easiest hike can be made more enjoyable with a short break for a snack. Not only will the remainder of your trip be more enjoyable, you will also not feel as drained and tired upon your return. Remember, if you push yourself too far it can take you up to a day for your body to catch up and regain balance.

Much of the same can be said for fluid intake. Southern California is one of the warmest and driest climates in the U.S. You cannot always count on finding water, and the water you may find may not be fit to drink. Make sure you bring enough water with you, or purification tablets or device, or prepackaged drinks, though those can be heavy to carry, and make sure you consume fluid at regular intervals. An average adult male loses one-and-a-half to two liters of water each

day.² In hot climates or at high elevations this can double.³ The body can be a quart or more low of water before your thirst sensors are activated, telling you that you need to drink. If you allow yourself to become dehydrated, electrolyte and other chemical imbalances occur that again can take up to a day to correct. A suggested guideline is to drink one half gallon of water each day with mild exertion. This should be doubled with heavy exertion.⁴

If you stop often to snack on some food and drink some fluids, your group will be more rested. This diminishes the risk of an accident occurring. Most accidents occur when the body is tired. Concentration is lost or the body becomes weak and unresponsive. By slowing down and taking a slower pace you will enjoy yourself more, and have a safer trip.⁵

When drinking to replace fluids, drink smaller portions more often rather than copious amounts once or twice. Once the body becomes too cold or hot, hours may be required to reoperate, regardless of how much fluid you eventually add. If you are out on the trail and have a schedule, you may not have the time for recuperation. Avoid this problem by drinking regularly.

Do not consume sugar drinks when exerting oneself in the out-of-doors. You are often putting in your body more sugar and chemicals than helpful fluids. Water or natural juices are better suited to the body's needs. Not allowing youth to bring pop can be a hard rule to enforce, and certainly an unpopular one. On short 1-2 mile trips, the rule may not be that necessary to uphold, but on any activity beyond that range, you risk complicating the situation more by using sugary fluids. You may feel better for a short time, but the body crash that occurs after the initial effects of the sugar and/or caffeine stimulation wears off is not worth risking. If you can, leave the pop at home, if for no other reason than to try something new!

Having discussed food and water needs, we also need to note the needs of controlling body temperatures. As a leader, you will have no control whatsoever over how warm or cold or wet it will be. That makes it important for you to exert

some control over the temperatures of the members of your group.

One of the most significant misunderstandings about temperature problems is that they only occur with weather extremes. This is not true. No safe zone or temperature exists where you are immune to body temperature problems.

Hypothermia, critically low body temperatures, heat exhaustion and heat stroke occur at outside temperatures well within the range of 50 to 100 degrees. This is the range that is most common. Improper clothing protection from the sun and rain narrows that margin even more. So, anytime you venture outside, you need to consider problems generated from the temperature.

Making sure that each person has adequate fluid replacement will help you avoid most temperature problems. Cool fluids in hot weather, and warm fluids in cold weather, serve to help the body adjust to outside temperature variations. They serve as great psychological pick-me-ups, too. Without adequate fluid, the body has to work harder to maintain body heat. Sometimes that work becomes a struggle, and that struggle often causes other problems such as muscle cramps and further energy loss.⁶

The next consideration for temperature control seems simple, but it is often overlooked; dress appropriately. In cold climates, encourage your group to wear layers of clothing.⁷ As persons become a little too cold or warm as their activity level changes, they can adjust by removing or adding layers. If you just have one piece of clothing, whether that be a heavy coat or a t-shirt, you do not have the ability to adjust much. You have placed yourself in an all or nothing situation. Most of the time, you do not win those situations in the out-of-doors.

People underestimate the importance of a hat. The head is where you lose 80 - 90% of your body temperature.⁸ Wearing a hat to hold your body heat in the cold weather, or shading the head to allow it to dissipate heat in warmer weather, makes a significant difference. Lots of youth do not want to wear hats because hats mess up their hair. Messed up hair is a lot less of a problem, however, than is

unconsciousness due to mismanagement of the heat or cold.

Special care needs to be given to keeping dry when the weather is wet. Even a slight amount of moisture on the body lowers body temperature at a much faster rate than normal.⁹ That's why your body sweats when you exercise. The body is trying to cool off. Moisture on the skin can present a significant problem if the body is already chilled. When you are out on the trail, stay dry. If you do get wet, make sure you are close to more protection and have the ability to get dry as soon as possible.

Within the last few years, doctors have been sharing the danger of exposure to the ultraviolet rays of the sun. This is not necessarily a temperature control problem, but it is still something that deserves caution. In the past I have personally been reluctant to heed these warnings, but, I've finally had to admit that the tan is not worth the price I may have to pay later for skin cancer or other skin problems caused by exposure to the sun.¹⁰ Too much sun one day can also cause a significant depletion of energy the next day and possibly painful skin irritations. A pack can be uncomfortable to carry with the pain of a sunburn.

If you protect yourself and your group from the damage the sun can do to your skin, you will have a better, safer time and you can still tell everyone about that tan you could have had. The smart way to venture out into the sun is to do it with protective clothing, and use protective skin lotions to block out the sun.¹¹ This is especially important at higher elevations when the sun can burn skin in significantly less time.

The easiest sign of temperature problems for an untrained person is a change in attitude or energy level. As the problem progresses, skin color or temperature may change. The color the skin turns or whether it becomes warmer or colder is not as important as is the fact that it has changed. Treatment varies with the severity of the incident. Generally, if people have become too cold, you will need to warm them. If persons have become too hot, you'll need to gradually cool them.

This can be done by adding warm or cool fluids to the body. The person should drink these fluids slowly. Adding too much fluid too quickly can worsen the victims condition. For seriously ill dehydrated victims, suggest they begin by taking two or three sips, every fifteen minutes.¹² For those persons who are not seriously ill, vomitting or completely exhausted, begin by offering a sips, every few minutes.¹³ If the person improves, allow them to take up to a cup of water within a couple of minutes. If this is helpful to the victim, continue. Within 30 minutes the person should feel well enough to continue at a slow pace. If the person has not improved within 30 minutes, professional treatment should be sought.

One sign that will signal that either food, fluids, or temperature problem is developing is a rapid change of attitude. Though everyone's disposition goes through slight changes, a sudden change in attitude is the body's way of saying that something is happening. You as the group leader need to be aware of that. Anxiety, or a quicker than usual temper is a reliable sign, and is often followed by sluggishness and withdrawal from the group. If not dealt with quickly, a sick group member becomes an anchor to the rest of the group. Then, no one has a good time. The group energy turns from enjoying the wilderness to getting this person back home.

The best first aid you as an untrained person can provide is to watch out for any attitude changes that occur. Upon the first sign of a problem, stop the person immediately. By taking the time to add fluids and food, the person's body gains a chance to rest and adjust. If you have waited until the person experiences a large change in energy level or body response, the problem is probably going to be significant and you will need to get professional help. By watching closely, you can avoid this situation.

If you notice a rapid change in attitude, or a general decline of attitude over a period of time, you should stop the group and deal with the problem, immediately.¹⁴ You will need to handle the person with sensitivity and privacy, but do not let the

group get ahead of you. Make sure the person has eaten and drunk well. If not, see if that can be corrected. Check to see if the person needs more clothing, or should take some clothing off. If possible, make use of the opportunity to have the group show this person support in whatever form that may take.

Even if eating has not been the cause, having someone share some food with you can provide a big lift. Having someone take some weight out of your pack can also be helpful, even if it is mostly emotional support. Before the problem develops more, you need to take care of it, now! Do not start out again until you are satisfied that the situation has improved. If you fail to do this, you risk paying a much greater price further down the trail.

The most common situations that arise in the out-of-doors that need attention are the minor ones.¹⁵ Though they are minor, they can cause serious problems both emotionally and physically if they are left untreated. Blisters on the feet are one of the most common annoyances found in the out-of-doors.

Again, prevention is the best medicine. Don't try to go out and hike great distances in footwear that is either inappropriate or has not been adequately broken in. There has been for some time a great amount of debate between those who prefer lighter footwear and those who feel that stiff, leather boots are the only shoe for the out-of-doors.¹⁶ Certainly, a main component of the answer to that controversy is what makes each individual is comfortable with. Some individuals can walk for a week in tennis shoes. Others need a stiffer boot that offers more ankle support to be comfortable, even for a short hike of three to five miles.

Each individual will have to decide for themselves what they want to use. But, as a leader, you can help by not planning hikes that will be demanding on the feet without first knowing that your group is aware of what they will need and has appropriate footwear. No one should be required to go out and buy new shoes to spend one afternoon exploring the out-of-doors. Structure your trip to match the needs and equipment of your group.

Blisters usually give warning that they are forming. Take heed of these warnings, and let your group know that a burning sensation or a hot spot on the foot is a sign that treatment needs to be initiated. Using either moleskin, available at most drug stores for a couple of dollars, or rearranging or adding socks may be necessary. Take the time to stop and treat your feet. You need to rely on them. If you wait too long before applying moleskin, once it is applied it will pull off the blistered skin causing pain and infection.

Part of the wonder of the out-of-doors is that it is unpredictable and has a life of its own. Sometimes this results in accidents regardless of the amount of careful preparation that has occurred. If an accident does occur, it is best for the untrained leader to contact someone who has professional first aid training. But, if you as a leader have significant training in this field, certification as an Emergency Medical Technician or higher, you may choose to initiate advanced treatment. The basic assumption of this guidebook is that if an accident occurs, someone should go for professional help in addition to appropriate attempts treat the injury.

If you do initiate treatment of the injury, keep in mind that your treatment should be designed as immediate and temporary.¹⁷ Your interest is in stabilizing the victim until health professionals can take over treatment. Keep your focus on short term measures. Do not try to do so much that immediate needs are ignored.

Before you set out on your trip, you should find out what help will be available in case of an emergency. The United States Forest Service (USFS), Sheriff, or local volunteer search and rescue teams are available for assistance depending on your location. Your job is to know who to turn to if an accident or illness occurs. These agencies are trained and more than willing to offer help. Before you leave, record how to contact these agencies and where the closest phone will be along a number of locations on your route, and take this information with you. A sample form to use for this purpose is included in Appendix C. The closest phone at the end of your hike will not help you much as you begin. Be prepared to know where the

nearest phone or help can be found regardless of where you might be along your route. Then take this information with you!

You can help out these agencies by not making the accident situation any worse than it already is. The majority of accidents, including snake bite, are not life threatening. Injuries are often made worse by well intentioned persons who treat without knowledge. If the person who has been injured can remain where they are, let them stay there. There is no need to move a person if they are safe staying where they are. Too often people want to do move the victim to try and make them more comfortable. The likelihood is that the person will be injured more during the move. This is not going to make the injured person feel more comfortable.

By taking the time to give clear and accurate directions to rescue personnel about where the help is needed and what kind of an accident has taken place, you can avoid unnecessary confusion. Any rescue personnel can tell you stories about the countless times when they have prepared for a particular situation, only to arrive and find that their information was inaccurate. Unfortunately, the treatment often suffers because of the mismanagement of information.

Your greatest contribution may be coordination. You've heard it said, don't panic. I will say it again. Don't panic! Take the time to think through your situation. "Frequently, the first action should be the organization of the rescue party...."¹⁸ The time you spend immediately following an accident will pay off in the quality of treatment that will be given once help arrives. Most likely the biggest problem you will have is how not to stay out of the way of medical professionals once they arrive.

These rescue persons will want to know where the accident happened, what type of accident occurred, who was affected, and when it happened. Before you initiate contact with a rescue agency, have a form filled out with the necessary information. Don't trust your memory. When the situation is relaxed and calm, your memory can probably be counted on. But when the situation is critical, don't trust yourself. There will be too much happening for you to remember all you will

need to remember. Write down what you want to say. You will need to have packed a pencil with the emergency rescue information form.

If the victim is a minor, an authorization for treatment of a minor can speed up treatment. It will be necessary before any definitive treatment, other than life sustaining in nature, can be performed. Youth can remain in a hospital emergency room for hours before receiving definitive treatment if no one has a signed authorization available and a parent or guardian cannot be located. Never go on a trip without a signed permission slip accompanied by a authorization for medical treatment.

If calling rescue personnel is not necessary, look for help in your first aid kit. But, before you do that, think again if you need help or not. If you have doubts, do not hesitate to call for help. Be sure to consider that though you may be able to deal sufficiently with the initial problem, you may not be able to deal with any further complications. You will need to ask yourself what complications are likely, and how likely are they to occur.

Do not try to push yourself and your resources too far because you are afraid of bothering someone by asking them for help. Rescue personnel are more than willing to help you, and are much more eager to respond to a situation that may not be critical than to respond to a situation where, if they had been called in sooner, they could have made a difference, possibly between life and death.

While you are waiting for rescue personnel to arrive, use your first aid kit to do what your level of training allows you to do. To use this first aid kit efficiently, you need to know what it contains. It is surprising how many people think that just having a first aid kit is sufficient. It is not. Without knowledge of what your kit contains and where certain items are kept you will lose precious time searching for what it is you want, and you may find out you do not have it. Your kit may be adequately stocked, but you may not know how to use its contents. Before you leave for your trip become familiar with what your kit contains, where it is located, and

how it is properly used.

Do not be fooled by claims made by prepackaged or industrially designed kits. Just because a kit has been purchased doesn't mean it can help you. Look through your kit before you leave home to know if it has the kinds of materials you can use and that will be helpful for the kinds of accidents you can reasonably expect. If what you want isn't there or you don't know how to use it, it isn't going to help you. Be familiar with what your kit offers and how to use what it contains.

A manual like this cannot list all that you will need for the various situations you will encounter. You will have to make many of those decisions on your own. With proper preparations you can have a safe excursion. If an accident does occur, and you are prepared, you will be able to meet it properly.

There is no substitute for proper first aid training on the trail. If you have a nurse or an emergency medical technician available to accompany you, you will be better prepared for an accident should it occur. If you will be in a position of leading a number of outdoor excursions, take the time to educate yourself in emergency medical procedures. Most community colleges have Emergency Medical Technology classes. If you cannot give the time that one of these classes demands, and I highly recommend you do, the American Red Cross offers basic first aid classes that should be mandatory for anyone who will be leading groups in the out-of-doors.

Conditioning

As I mentioned before, one of the best ways to avoid the need for first aid is to take the time to condition and prepare yourself for your trip. Again, this is often overlooked. Most persons do not realize the amount of energy used in being active in the out-of-doors. If the body is not accustomed to the type or length of the activity, problems can occur. By conditioning oneself and making sure the group does not go beyond the level of their conditioning, you are helping to insure a safe and enjoyable trip.

One reason that being active in the out-of-doors uses a lot of energy is because the activity often takes place at a higher altitude than is normal for the person. Even driving up to the mountains, people can find themselves short of breath. The higher in elevation you travel the less oxygen is available to you, and the longer it takes for the body to take in the oxygen that it needs. When the body is working on lower levels of oxygen, it is easy for other aspects of the body's performance to become imbalanced. This imbalance causes feelings of tiredness.

But one does not have to go to the 6,000 foot level to experience that. Even at the 3,000 to 3,500 foot levels, the lack of oxygen in the air is noticeable and must be taken into consideration. If you prepare and get in shape at sea level for exploring the mountains, you will have to take altitude into consideration when you begin.

Before leaving for your hiking trip, do some walking. Get accustomed to wearing your footwear and the weight they will add to your feet. While doing that, put a few pounds of weight into your day pack and wear that as you take your conditioning walks. A little bit of preparation can avoid a lot of discomfort on the trail. Encourage members of your group to work out together in preparation for your trip. This can serve as an excellent opportunity to build pre-trip community.

The same is true for riding your bike, or for skiing, or for other activities. Do not expect to be able to start out without gradual introduction of the activity. Depending on the level of activity you are attempting, begin a few days or a month or two before and work yourself up to the desired activity level. You will enjoy your trip better, and the conditioning is good for your health, too. The best way to get in shape for a particular activity is to do that activity.¹⁹ If you will be riding, ride. If you will be hiking, hike. If you will be carrying a pack, carry a pack as often as you can.²⁰ This will make a significant amount of difference when you need to rely on your conditioning.

Once you have trained and are ready to begin, spend a few moments just before the activity warming up. Some simple stretching exercises will be invaluable in avoiding muscle strains or even sprains. Spend five or ten minutes stretching prior to departing with the group. This can be done as a group, or while people are making final preparations, going through their packs, tying shoes, and so forth. These stretches should not be painful, and should be performed evenly without bouncing. Proper warm-up can eliminate many of the aches and pains that you will encounter along the trail and upon your return, it also helps to reduce the risk of muscle injuries.

For the best exercises, if you are not familiar with any, talk to a physician or to someone you know who regularly runs or exercises. Many running books have special sections concerning warm-up exercises.²¹ If in doubt as to the importance of a good warmup, you should get the necessary confirmation from them.

This is even more important when you are on an overnight or extended trip. The beginning of the second day can be quite painful if you have overdone the first day. The group may be unwilling to experience the pain of stretching, but if you do not stretch, those overworked muscles will be tight for the new day's demands. This usually ends in muscle injuries. Avoid that by taking a few moments at the start of each day or each activity to loosen up. This can serve not only as a health measure but it can also help the group focus before hitting the trail.

Equipment

For the person who enjoys being in the out-of-doors, the next best thing to experiencing the natural world seems to be talking about and acquiring outdoor equipment. If you spend any time at all around back-country campfire, you will discover that conversation drifts toward what style of pack, tent, stove, or sleeping bag you use. If you are taking a break from a bike ride, and you meet other riders, you may find yourself checking out the bike frame and identifying the derailleur before you say "hello."

As enjoyable as this pastime can be, it can lead you down the path of caring more for your equipment than for your experience of the out-of-doors. As a leader, your job will be to avoid getting caught in this trap; your example will be important to your group.

The most important rule is this: for most one day, simple, short excursions, no special equipment is necessary, regardless of the activity. The added measure of comfort you will receive from investing in special equipment for most one day, simple, short excursions, is not worth the amount of money you will need to spend to get the best equipment. If on your one day, simple, short excursion, your equipment fails you and your experience is significantly compromised, you have probably pushed yourself too hard.

I assume readers understand that spending a week bicycling down the coast or backpacking in the Sierras does demand special experience and equipment.²² That discussion is beyond the scope of this guidebook. I want to warn you about the temptation to overbuy in quantity and quality for your first day hike. This happens all too often. Unfortunately, the result of this is that the encounter with the natural world has been compromised and any enthusiasm that once existed for a return trip has been lost on blisters, sore muscles, and a lack of gas money to get to the trailhead. Good equipment will enhance your experience only if it is the right equipment for the level of activity.

Most youth put a lot of importance on the style, brand, and quality of clothing or equipment that they wear. You probably will not be able to change that. You can make sure that parents and youth know, however, what the reasonable expectations for equipment are.

For most day hikes, a good pair of tennis shoes will do fine. If persons have boots, certainly let them wear them. Problems occur when someone goes out and spends a small fortune on a new pair of boots, designed by the latest Everest assault team, and the youth begins to complain an hour into the hike because he or she did

not have time to break the boots in, and the added weight is making walking difficult.

Any kind of a hat, whether it be a straw hat or a baseball cap, will provide adequate shade and insulation. For activities that will lead persons into the cold, multiple layers of clothing will suffice. If you are going to take a lengthy trip or if the conditions are known to be harsh, special consideration of wool needs to be made because of its quality of heat retention even when wet. For simple excursions, suggest they use clothing they already have and adjust your plans if the weather does not match your expectations. For more extended trips, proper clothing for flexible and changing conditions will be necessary, and those may have to be specially purchased. When you require special equipment, you may be restricting those youth who are on a more limited budget. To allow as many as possible to go, try to avoid overpricing your trip for the average youth. Be sure to check with the church to see if scholarship money might be available. By offering a variety of experiences you can assure that even if one of the specialty trips is too expensive to attend, there will be other offerings that a person could attend.

NOTES

Chapter 7

- ¹ James A. Wilkerson, ed., Medicine for Mountaineering (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1985), 205
- ² Wilkerson, 31.
- ³ Wilkerson, 31.
- ⁴ Wilkerson, 33.
- ⁵ Wilkerson, 223.
- ⁶ Wilkerson, 226-29.
- ⁷ Wilkerson, 201.
- ⁸ Steven Williams, RN, Class lecture in Emergency Medical Technology, Mt. San Antonio Community College (Ca.), Fall 1979.
- ⁹ Wilkerson, 201.
- ¹⁰ Wilkerson, 217.
- ¹¹ Wilkerson, 219.
- ¹² Wilkerson, 33.
- ¹³ David Werner, Where There Is No Doctor (Palo Alto, Ca.: Hesperian Foundation, 1977), 152
- ¹⁴ Wilkerson, 224.
- ¹⁵ Lowell J. Thomas and Joy L. Sanderson, First Aid for Backpackers and Campers (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), 89
- ¹⁶ The following two sources offer a balanced approach to this debate: Bill Gale, The Wonderful World of Walking (New York: William Morrow, 1979), 152, and Cheri Elliott, Backpacker's Digest (Northfield, Ill.: DBI Books, 1981), 36
- ¹⁷ Thomas and Sanderson, 1.

¹⁸ Wilkerson, 24.

¹⁹ Colin Fletcher, The New Complete Walker (New York: Knopf, 1974), 27

²⁰ Fletcher, 27.

²¹ James Fixx, The Complete Book of Running, (New York: Random House, 1972), 60-3

²² For helpful guides for specialty equipment, talk to your local backpacking store and read these resources: Thomas H. Griffin, Let's Go Backpacking (Ramona, Ca.: Sentinel, 1972); Dennis Look, Joy of Backpacking: People's Guide to the Wilderness (Sacramento: Jalmar, 1976); and Gary Ferguson, Freewheeling: Bicycling the Open Road (Seattle: The Mountaineers, 1984)

CHAPTER 8

Sample Outdoor Experiences

This chapter contains six sample activity sites. If you have not read the preceding chapters, stop and do so before going any further.

Time is always at a premium. Certainly the temptation exists to skim over the preparatory materials and begin planning with the samples, especially if you are a volunteer youth worker trying to balance your ministry activities with job, family, and other responsibilities. But this approach will not work.

The materials that follow will be helpful only if you have first worked through the previous chapters, giving specific attention to Chapter 5 and Chapter 7. Only then will these basic outlines serve as foundations on which to build your own activities.

Four one-day and two extended week-long experiences are included in this material. The first activity site is the Big Santa Anita Canyon. This area is easily accessible Spring, Summer and Fall, and during moderate winters. Phone boxes located throughout the canyon allow communication with the United States Forest Service Ranger Station and a local pack station if there is a need for emergency help. A variety of trail possibilities are available. For all these reasons this site is well suited for activities and a significant amount of this chapter is designated to this site.

The second activity site is the mountainous area located southwest of Palm Springs, and accessed by the Palm Springs Aerial Tramway. The high elevation almost insures snow during the winter months of December through March. The tramway access eliminates the complications of traveling on snowy or icy roads to get to a winter activity site. Once you have ridden the tramway up the steep, canyon wall a variety of activities are available. Groups can choose snow shoeing, X-C skiing or

hiking. Some rental equipment is available on-site for a charge.

The third activity site, Deer Springs trail, is just west of the Palm Springs tramway site, yet it is accessed from the west from the town of Idyllwild. This area is accessible summer and fall, providing interesting alternatives to the Santa Anita Canyon due to its higher starting elevation of nearly 6,000 feet. This trail offers both densely forested areas and some splendid views across wide open canyons.

The fourth activity site, the Redondo Beach to Santa Monica bike trail, is included as an alternative to more natural environment locations that feature foot travel, and revelation as a program theme. Most of the previous program suggestions have been directed towards discovering God through creation. Because of the wide variety of people that will be encountered along the bike trail, and the different economic environments that exist along sections of the route, the suggestions that are given for program activity at this site are aimed more towards looking at people and how they relate to the environment and each other. This site provides interesting opportunities to view the differences in the communities of Venice Beach and Marina Del Rey. Though these two areas are only a few miles apart, they stand in great contrast.

The first week-long experience activity site listed is the Red's Meadow backpack trip. The leader of this excursion needs to have had previous backpacking experience. Because of the short, daily mileage and the minimal elevation changes, especially during the first two thirds of the trip, this loop is ideally suited for first time backpackers. Having the fourth day as a layover day amidst a natural hot springs area is further enhancement to beginner campers.

The final site listed is for a week-long bicycle trip beginning just south of San Francisco and ending in Morrow Bay. This is one of the most spectacular areas along the California Coast. A leader trained in bicycle touring is required, yet the distances allow for first time bikers. If you plan well, you will only be two nights without shower facilities. That may sound like a hardship, but seasoned bike

tourers, and especially backpackers, know that not having showers at camp is more often the rule than the exception.

These six activity sites are offered to assist in the formulation of your own plans. Be sure to research the trail and program guides listed in Appendix A for more complete program and logistical information. You will need to use those resources extensively in your planning. The information that follows is offered only as a foundation and will not suffice on its own.

Big Santa Anita Canyon

The Big Santa Anita Canyon is accessible by heading north on Santa Anita Avenue off the 210 freeway. After traveling north approximately two miles on Santa Anita Avenue you will leave the residential area and begin climbing in elevation along a narrow and windy mountain road. Traffic along this road can be heavy. Be sure to drive slowly and carefully.

Approximately five miles beyond the residential area the road will end at the Chantry Flats United States Forest Service (USFS) Ranger Station. Adequate free parking is usually available at the lower or upper ranger station parking lots. Additional parking is available next to the public picnic area at the Lonergan Pack Station. Though there is a small charge for this parking, the cost includes having your vehicle watched by pack station staff.

One of the many advantages of this activity site is the variety of hiking trails that begin from the parking lots. An overall perspective of these trails can be seen on the Mt. Wilson Quadrangle topographical map, available at most outdoor specialty stores or by ordering through the mail from the U.S. government. Two trails begin from the parking areas. The trailhead for the Canyon Trail to the canyon floor is located at the gate on the east side of the road just before entering the USFS lower parking area. The gated fire road off the upper USFS parking area marks the trailhead to the Upper Winter Creek trail. The elevation from both trailheads is approximately 2,200 feet. Both of these trails lead eventually to the summit of Mt.

Wilson, at 5,710 feet.

John W. Robinson's Trails of the Angeles is the best resource for investigating any of the alternative routes through the canyon. The easiest and most well-marked trail is the Canyon Trail through the canyon floor. This trail was used to transport equipment and supplies for the construction of check dams along the canyon floor in the early 1960s. The pavement along the first mile of the trail is one of a few reminders of that project that are left. The group may want to keep track of other evidence that remains of the construction.

Some group orientation will need to occur prior to your arrival at this Chantry Flats area for any of the trails beginning there. On most days considerable activity takes place in the parking and picnic areas. You can ask your group to meet at the picnic area just above the restrooms so that you will be able to find each other easily. This also allows people to use the restroom while the group is gathering. Because of the number of persons and the level of activity in the general area, only the basic instructions are needed to get the group to the first stopping point one mile down the trail. This should include identifying the person who will lead the group, the person who in the rear, and the instruction stay always between these two persons. Once everyone is ready, the group can move to the trailhead.

After leaving the gate at the trailhead, the trail leads into the canyon through a couple of switchbacks. About a quarter mile down the trail, at the second switchback, is the First Water Trail to the canyon bottom. This trail connects with the canyon bottom about a mile downstream, south, of where the Canyon Trail ends. If you will be hiking during the summer months, you may want to consider returning to the parking areas from the canyon bottom via the First Water trail. Though the distance is increased by a mile to a mile and a half, the incline on this trail is more gradual and it is cooler and much more shaded than the Canyon Trail. During the mid-afternoon hours of summer the pavement of the Canyon Trail can reflect a great deal of heat, making hiking quite uncomfortable.

After one mile you will have reached the canyon bottom and the end of the Canyon Trail. As you cross the short bridge and leave the pavement you will come to a small clearing called Roberts' Camp, named after the Roberts family who were its first residents and later opened a business there renting cabins to the public. Just prior to crossing the bridge you will have passed a cabin on your right. This was the Roberts family home. You will pass a number of private cabins as you travel along these trails. You will want to instruct your group to respect the privacy of the individuals who are using these cabins. There are two facilities in the Big Santa Anita Canyon area that are available for public use. One is a Girl Scout camp just before Fern Lodge, and the second is a United Methodist Church camp facility just past Spruce Grove Campground. The ranger station and the Lonergan Pack Station have information regarding reserving these sites.

The open area at the canyon bottom serves as an excellent location to gather your group back together. Pulling the group together and counting noses helps insure that everyone is on the right trail. The clearing also gives you a bit more privacy than the parking lots to do some brief discussing about proper trail etiquette and program theme introduction. There is also a pair of restrooms on the north side of the clearing. These will be the last public restrooms that will be available to you before your return. If any in your group did not take advantage of the restroom facilities at the parking lots, remind them to do so there.

The clearing is at the intersection of four trails. The first trail, the Canyon Trail, is the one leading directly back to the parking areas that you would have just left. The second trail, the Winter Creek Trail, leads to the west towards Hogue's Camp. An emergency phone box is located about 50 feet up this trail. Leaders should familiarize themselves with the location of this phone box. The third trail leads south and follows the stream downstream to First Water, meeting the First Water Trail that then leads back to the trail head at the second switchback of the Canyon Trail. A phone box is located near the intersection of the canyon bottom

and the First Water Trail. The fourth trail, the Main Canyon Trail, heads north on a gradual incline, heading upstream along the bank of the stream. This is the trail you should continue exploring.

This stop is the best place to introduce the program theme for the day. You have more privacy here than is available at the trail head. If you wait until you arrive at the next stopping point, Fern Lodge, to introduce program, the group may have already determined their own agenda, and this may not agree with what you had planned. Time spent at this point setting the context for what is to follow is very helpful in establishing the format for the trip. Included in this format should be the instruction that the group should not pick anything or destroy any living creature. It is also important to mention that care be given to nonliving creation, too. You may want to read some of the Genesis creation story or a Psalm to introduce the theme of the inherent integrity of the natural world and our need to respect it as creation of God.

Make sure everyone knows everybody else. If necessary, have each person give their own name and some other piece of information about themselves. If you will be spending some time further down the trail looking at the God as Creator image, ask the group to begin to become more aware of their surroundings by identifying what in the environment is different from their home and from the trailhead just a mile back on the trail. This stop should last no longer than 10 minutes. The group will be eager to keep going. If you spend too much time at this early stop, you may dampen interest and enthusiasm for the rest of the trip.

About one mile up the Main Canyon trail you will come to another trail junction at Fern Lodge. Another phone box is located on the left, west side of the trail about 50 feet prior to this junction. Fern Lodge was a lodge and cabin rental facility, later ran as a YMCA camp for the City of Pasadena. Like many of the early built facilities in the foothills of the San Gabriels, fire has taken its toll and few of the original buildings remain. An interesting activity to do at Fern Lodge is to

search out the old foundations. You probably won't be able to find the remains of the old swimming pool. It has been filled in with dirt for years. But, you might find the compass that has been carved onto an old foundation floor.

To find these foundations, take the Upper Canyon Trail leading southwest. About fifty feet from the junction you will find a trail registry for signing in on the trail and the foundations will be obvious. This area serves as a wonderful resting area, regardless of which trail you will take from here. The foundations are great benches to rest on, and the oak trees provide comforting shade. Topics for group discussion can include consideration of the permanence of God's created order and the temporariness of human creations, and consideration of what humans beings are leaving behind for future generations to inherit. What responsibilities do we have as a society to leave the world in the same way that we found it? If we are going to offer improvements, What kinds? Is change that can never be reserved always an improvement?

This area also provides a unique look at a location that retains water more than much of the canyon. The area surrounding Fern Lodge is sloped such that runoff is not as great as it is in other areas. Because the area is protected from direct sunlight by a ridge to the south, a variety of trees have been able to establish themselves in the immediate area. The leader can either direct the group towards realizing this on their own, or acknowledge the way that the plants and trees respond to different conditions and have the group think about ways that they respond to different environments, social, cultural, etc., in their lives. Most importantly, this is a great place to let people roam and explore. The benches and foundations provide a central location for individuals to gather when they return from their mini-treks. The area provides a wide variety of vegetation to view. The purpose behind all of these activity sites is to encourage the individual to interact with the natural world. So, let the fun begin!

More advanced hikers may want to continue on the Upper Trail along the side of the canyon wall. This trail passes through north facing hillsides of mature Oak and Spruce trees and across south facing slopes of Manzanita scrub as it winds its way high along the upper canyon wall. The differences in vegetation of the north and south facing slopes is dramatized in a number of places along this trail as you cross east to west facing ridges. In about a mile and a half the trail meets the Lower Trail, at Falling Sign Junction. Continuing beyond Falling Sign Junction on the Main Canyon trail will take you to Cascade Picnic Area, Spruce Grove Public Campground, Camp Sturtevant and then on to the summit of Mt. Wilson. Phone boxes are located at Cascade Picnic Area and at Camp Sturtevant. Taking the Lower Trail loop back to the Fern Lodge area offers a nice loop following the stream bed along the canyon floor, taking you just above Sturtevant Falls and returning you again to the Fern Lodge Junction. This loop dramatically illustrates the climatic differences of south and north sloping canyon walls and contrasts that with the moist shady stream bed. The total loop distance is about three miles.

Hiking groups with little experience should take the Falls Trail from the Fern Lodge junction to spectacular Sturtevant Falls. This 200 foot waterfall is a just 1/2 mile up the Falls Trail from Fern Lodge. To take this trail continue heading upstream and cross the stream about 50 feet beyond the Fern Lodge junction. The trail will dead end at the falls.

The falls provide a great place to have recreation or to structure some group time. The water is shallow enough for wading and there are plenty of large rocks available for sunning. The group should be prohibited from attempting to climb the falls or the steep walls that surround the base of the falls. It is too dangerous, and every year there are injuries that occur there to individuals who push themselves too far and try to scale the loose rock walls or the large rock faces. No one should be allowed to go barefoot in the area, in or out of the water. Over the years careless picnickers have not disposed of their glass containers properly. Without protective

footwear it is easy to get cut. This location offers the opportunity to point out that the abuse of the area by people who were there before you limits your experience of the area. You can't go barefoot because someone left broken glass. If discussion of proper trash disposal has not been heeded, this is an excellent opportunity to bring it up again.

This is also an excellent location to discuss how one hears the natural world. The falls are noisy. Sometimes youth do not realize how much natural noise is around them. You may want to ask the group to compare how they respond to the noise of the falls with how they respond to the same level of noise from a home stereo or walkman. Have the group break into groups of two or three and have one person wear a blindfold to focus on the sound. Have this person led around the area by the other person(s). Is certain kind of noise easier, or more natural, to listen to? What other noises can be heard through the falls? If the person did not know what the sound of the falls really was, would it be frightening? Are there other sounds of the natural world that are frightening?

When the group is ready to leave the falls area and begin to return to the parking areas they will have about a two and a half mile walk. Plan on taking at least an hour for this hike. The final part of the paved trail is steep, and often after four to five miles of hiking, it can be quite tiring. You can return to Fern Lodge and stop there, or you can just stop along the trail somewhere. In addition, make sure that the group agrees to stop back at Roberts Camp. This will allow the group to make sure everyone is together for the final mile back to the cars. You can also use this last stop for a closing. Again, the areas around the cars will not provide much privacy. My suggestion is that not too much program or theme input be given on the return trip. The group will probably be tired. The return trip can be best utilized with informal input from the leader, depending on the interest level of the group. Before you leave Roberts Camp, discuss with the group your plan for the return trip from the parking lot.

Those that have the desire to do more than just the basic hike to the falls are encouraged to continue past the upper junction of the Upper and Lower Canyon Trails. The farther you get up the canyon the more serene and less explored the area becomes. From the summit of Mt Wilson, about five miles and 3,000 feet elevation gain from the Falling Sign Junction, you can see the ocean on a very clear day. An observatory and a snack bar have operated there in the past during various times of the year. A small zoo was also on the grounds at one time.

An alternative trail to make a loop of the Mt. Wilson summit runs from Hogee's Camp at the west end of the Winter Creek Trail to the summit. There is an additional phone box located near Hogee's Camp Campground. For the three miles above Hogee's Camp the trail follows a ridge, offering beautiful vantage points of the canyon below and points further west. This trail is steep, and at some points it has not been well maintained. This route would be more appropriate for persons who have some previous hiking experience and who want to challenge themselves physically.

Whatever your skill level, the Big Santa Anita Canyon offers a path that can suit your needs. Because of the variety of trails in such a concentrated area, you and your group can return many times to discover new sites without having to travel on the same trails.

Palm Springs Aerial Tramway

The Palm Springs Aerial Tramway offers a winter snow experience during the months of December through March without many of the problems that can be encountered traveling to other winter environments. The tramway is accessed through the Valley Station in Chino Canyon, elevation 2,643 feet, a few miles southwest of the city of Palm Springs, at the intersection of Highway 111 and Tramway Road. The two-mile ride on the tram takes you to the eastern escarpment of Long Valley, at an elevation of 8,516 feet. There is a charge to ride the tramway, but the spectacular views as you rise above the valley floor and the dependability of

the snow on top makes this trip a rewarding and unique opportunity.

Before you leave for the site, establish plans for how the group will organize and move into the trams when they arrive at the parking lot. Because of the public nature of the area where you load into the tram, the Valley Station, this is not a good place to form community or introduce program. If you have a process that is already worked out with the group, transitioning from the cars to the tram will go much more smoothly.

If you can arrange with tramway personnel to have the entire group ride up the mountain in the same tram car the group will be able to leave from Mountain Station for the snow immediately upon arriving without delay. If this is not possible because of tram schedules or group size, a leader should be with each separate group and the first group to arrive at the top should stay close to the Mountain Station loading area until the remainder of the group arrives.

As you ride up the tramway to Mountain Station there will be a recording playing in the tramway car pointing out signs of the various climate zones you will be passing through. Before leaving the Valley Station you should alert your group to look for signs of elevation changes. It will be helpful if the leader can point out different types of vegetation that live at the various altitudes and how that vegetation has adjusted to the different conditions along the canyon wall. A big asset on this trip would be a resource person knowledgeable in how climate affects environment. The tram offers the unique opportunity of viewing these changes in a way that clearly illustrates adaptability. You can't get such a clear sense of this from walking from climatic zone to another.

Once you arrive at the top, you will need to gather the group together for additional orientation. This will be difficult in the lodge, and if the weather is harsh outside you may not have an ideal setting. This is not the best setting to do group work when you are not able to gather outside. But this setting does provide opportunities for hiking, skiing, and general snow recreation such as making

snowpersons and throwing snowballs. Consider this as you make your plans for this site. You may want to accentuate the program input on the way up, and minimize it once you are on the mountain. Weather is a big factor to consider. The weather on top can be quite different from the conditions on the valley floor.

Once you are on top and outside, the Mountain Station offers a warm area to rest and a snack bar for warm drinks if the cold begins to dampen spirits. Public restrooms are also available there. The California Department of Parks and Recreation has published an excellent hiking map with additional information concerning winter health concerns, some history and environmental descriptive material, and wilderness permit information for the area. This publication is available at the tramway station or by contacting the Mount San Jacinto State Wilderness office or the USFS San Jacinto Ranger District. Wilderness permits are required if you plan to enter the wilderness area. They are free and available at the USFS ranger station a short distance from the Mountain Station.

Just behind the Mountain Station there is a Nordic Ski Center that is open November 15 to April 15, snow permitting. A limited amount of snow recreational rental equipment is available. Because of the volume of persons that can use this area it is advised that groups make prior reservations or bring their own equipment.

Beyond the ski center is Long Valley. This valley is relatively flat and large enough that the crowds can be escaped. A couple of well-marked beginner ski trails traverse this valley. There are both wooded areas and open areas with spectacular winter views of Mt. San Jacinto and the town of Palm Springs in the valley below. West of Long Valley is the remainder of the 13,000 acre Mount San Jacinto State Park, with 54 miles of hiking trails. If any of your group plans to explore beyond the Long Valley area be sure that they have experience in winter travel, that they go in groups, and that you have agreed upon an adequate system of checking back in with the group at a specified time and location.

One of the main objectives while exploring a snow environment is to keep warm. One of the ways to keep warm is to keep moving. This makes total group interaction and program input difficult during the time when the group is outside. Having the program input occur before the group goes outside and having written material the group can use while outside in smaller groups may be better suited for this site, especially if the temperatures are significantly below freezing.

Besides the climate changes that are evident on the ride up, the snow is part of the uniqueness of this site. Most youth have some experience playing with snow, but often they don't know much about what snow is. To help the group appreciate snow more, you may want to ask them to find samples of different kinds of snow. Examples might be powder snow, a crusty snow if the temperatures have increased and decreased, ice where snow has melted and refrozen, and snow that has been affected by sun shading and exposure to wind. Encourage the group to feel the snow through all their senses, and to appreciate more of the differences found in snow. At a glance, snow looks like snow. But to look at snow carefully, you can see some major distinctions between types of snow. Use this as a starting point to explore what other kinds of distinctions may be in the natural world that we may not recognize. This is an excellent place to point out how organized and related all of creation is. Though we sometimes perceive the natural world as consisting of random occurrences, when we look closely we can identify patterns and variations. God did not create chaos. God created order out of chaos. Introduce the question of why God made these distinctions? What purpose might they serve? Is God revealed through these patterns?

As the group finishes with their exploration and recreation or if the weather changes for the worse, the Mountain Station serves as an excellent gathering point. The snack bar offers a variety of warm drinks, and space is available for lounging while wet clothes are drying and bodies are warming. Once the group has gathered, the tram offers a quick descent to more moderate temperatures and the return home.

Deer Springs Trail

The Deer Springs Trail begins at the county visitor center one mile west of Idyllwild on Highway 243. Park on the south side of the road in the visitor center parking area. The marked trail begins on the north side of the road just across from the parking. Due to the starting elevation of nearly 6,000 feet, this area offers a high mountain environment quite different from the lower elevations in the San Gabriels.

The area is accessible from late spring to fall. During winter and early spring this area is covered with snow. Because of the possibility of sudden and unexpected storms that can occur there, and the difficulties in finding the trail in snow, I do not recommend this trail as a program site during the winter. The Palm Springs Aerial Tramway is a much better and safer site for winter or snow trips.

The parking area at the visitor center is a good place to begin group building and to establish the context for the rest of the hike. Because it is a more remote setting than the Big Santa Anita Canyon area, you are more likely to have the opportunity to talk with your group without the distractions of other people interrupting you. You can also spend some time orienting the group to your program goals. Once you have finished setting the context for the hike, stay together and cross the road to the trailhead as a group. The crossing can be dangerous.

The trail heads northward gradually gaining altitude through oak, Jeffrey pine and large manzanita. There are open areas offering excellent views of the terrain of the San Bernardino National Forest along with the more densely forested areas. The path passes by some medium-sized rock formations that provide opportunities for some basic rock scrambling. If your group chooses to scramble, be sure to watch them so they won't get involved beyond their skill level.

Two-and-a-half miles up the trail you will come to the Suicide Rock Trail Junction. Groups can either head due east to the top of Suicide Rock or continue in a generally northern direction toward Strawberry Jct. Campground two miles further up the Deer Springs trail. The Suicide rock trail does have some elevation loss

before it again begins to climb. This elevation change should be considered if your group is new to hiking and not in ideal shape. The altitude makes any variation in the slope of the trail more difficult to traverse.

If you continue up the Deer Springs trail you will continue to gradually gain elevation. This advantage becomes evident on your return trip when you will be able to return all the way down hill. Most groups will easily be able to hike out on a gradually sloping down hill trail. You will not be caught trying to drag hikers back to the trailhead. When a trail does not have an even grade but has both up and down sections, similar to the Suicide Rock trail, your group will tend to get more spread out with the slower members straggling during the inclines. Another advantage of this trail is that you can better plan the return trip time back to the parking area. The slow gradual elevation change allows the descent time to be more accurately figured at about one third of the amount of time the group used on the ascent. Hiking over various terrains make estimating return trip times more difficult.

Another advantage of the Deer Springs Trail is that you can easily decide when you have hiked enough or run out of time and stop and turn around. There is no summit or final destination that must be reached to fully appreciate the beauty of the area. This is especially nice if you are under specific time constraints or if the group is young and the energy level unpredictable. If you are hiking with young, inexperienced hikers, the low number of junction trails is also a benefit, providing fewer opportunities for hikers to become separated from the group.

The Deer Springs trail area provides more privacy and isolation than the other two areas mentioned previously. A variety of spots along the trail are available for pulling the group together for serious programming without interruption. As a result of this remoteness you are likely to see more signs of wildlife in this area.

Though this area is the most remote of the day hikes included in this guidebook, it too has suffered from the way in which it has been treated. The air above 6,000 feet should be clear, but the group will have the opportunity to look

down into the Riverside area and observe the brown haze of California smog. This smog has even been damaging many of the trees at the higher elevations. You may want to encourage the group to discuss the way that their lifestyle back home is impacting the environment so far away. Obvious signs will be the number of trees that are in the process of dying or have had their tops blown off by the wind.

There should also be some less obvious signs that can be generalized to a variety of areas. Have the group identify ways that they can tell someone has been there before. Take five minutes, and have each member of the group find an area within 100 yards that they would initially assume has not been explored. Then, have each person look over that area and find, upon closer evaluation, what signs are present that they are not the first person who has seen this sight.

Look for trash that has been left along the trail. You may have the person who is bringing up the rear of the group consciously look for and collect trash during the hike. Your group may be surprised to see how quickly it accumulates and how much of it they missed along the side of the trail. Hopefully, this exercise will encourage them to be more careful with their waste and to remind them that there is a lot in the out-of-doors that they may not be seeing.

Once the group has discovered that they are not the first group to visit this area, you may want to make the shift to looking at who considers this area home. Emphasize the “who” rather than the “what.” Much more integrity and respect are given to a who than to a what. See how many plants and animals can be distinguished. You need not be able to identify them to perceive their uniquenesses and to begin to appreciate the variety. Challenge the group to see if they can tell how specific plants and animals have had to adapt to the human visitors.

If the group enjoyed the area and would like to return, the trail out of Humber Park, and the South Ridge and Marion Mt. trails should be investigated. These activity sites offer the same quality of scenic beauty, but are generally steeper and more difficult trails to hike.

Redondo Beach to Santa Monica Pier Bicycle Path

The final one-day activity site listed here is the Redondo Beach to Santa Monica Pier bike path. This activity site is included as an alternative to the more natural wilderness areas that have been previously listed. More of humanity's footprint through the natural world will be evident at this location. But even with the crowds and pollution, the area along the ocean is still a wonderful place to explore.

The suggestions for this site do not encourage the same kind of interacting with the out-of-doors as has been suggested with the other sites. The educational model this guidebook offers is not utilized here in a strict sense. The ocean does provide a unique environmental setting to explore. Those who would like to pursue that aspect of the site are encouraged to do that. The approach that is suggested here is offered to give an example of the variety of different ways that the natural world can be utilized for education.

This trip not only offers approximately 15 miles of coast riding (the one way distance is about 23 miles), but during this ride some of the most widely divergent cultural areas can be found. From the yacht sales yards and exclusive restaurants of Del Mar to the human carnival of the street scene in Venice, the people often become the scenery along this route. One way to explore the variation in communities is to spend some time as a group discussing how and where Jesus would have fit into this strip of Southern California Beach. Be careful not to concentrate just on the people you see but look at how those people choose, or are forced, to deal with their environment. Use the variety and the colorfulness of the people to begin to explore the ways different people interact with the out-of-doors.

The best place to park your vehicles and begin riding is at The Pier shopping and restaurant complex in Redondo Beach. There is plenty of available parking for a nominal charge, and much of that parking is covered. That can be beneficial during hot summer days.

From The Pier, ride northward along The Strand of Manhattan Beach. The bike path is clearly marked and continues all the way to the Santa Monica Pier. Along this route you will pass many kinds of development. Though none of these areas remain untouched, some areas are less developed than others. Along specific portions of the path, one can see evidence of measures to stop erosion. Some areas have been seeded with plants that hold the sandy soil in place, and other areas have large concrete structures that are designed to channel water in specific ways. Some of these measures work. Other areas show signs of humanity losing the battle of trying to control the earth's natural forces. These examples can be used to guide discussions concerning what we can or cannot do, and what we should or should not do, as responsible stewards of God's creation.

The uniqueness of this site is the different kinds of people you are likely to encounter. These people relate to each other and the natural world in various ways. Throughout the New Testament Jesus is shown to be in conflict with the culture and the power structure of his time. The differences in how individuals respond to cultural norms and power structures is evident along this route. An interesting approach to exploring this area is to try to imagine what Jesus would have said to the different people you will encounter.

At various predetermined points along your route, stop the group and read a scripture text that allows and encourages a comparison with the area you have stopped in. Matt. 4:18-22 and Mark 10:17-25 are examples of scriptures that have relevance. Have the group consider who Jesus would ask to join him as a disciple. Is it possible that there are disciples who we do not recognize because they appear different from us? Have the group think about how the disciples were chosen and how that would compare to the persons who are currently spending time along the beach. Read Mark 1:16-20 to the group, and have them discuss what kind of a group this would form today. Is this different from the group around Jesus? Also, who would Jesus talk to about wealth and entering the kingdom of God? What would he

say to them today?

If the group divides into smaller units of three or four persons, have them interact with some of these people. Rather than just observing the different people you will encounter along the route, have the group members initiate some conversation with these people. Ask the group to be aware of who wants to talk and who does not. How do these people communicate their feelings about themselves, the conversation that is being initiated, and the out-of-doors? What kinds of similarities do you find in these attitudes? How do our feelings towards ourselves relate to our feelings toward the environment? Ask if the group has any suggestions about how to change their attitudes toward the environment or themselves. Such discussions can happen in informal ways as you ride along the path. If there is no spot available for non-embarrassing conversation these readings and questions can be discussed after the trip as well.

Following your discussion, continue north along the path. The path dead ends about 22 miles north of The Pier, one mile past the Santa Monica Pier. Be sure to gauge the energy level of the group and turn back when you have used half or less of your available energy. If you reach the northern end but have no energy once you arrive it will be a long ride back, especially if an afternoon or evening wind comes out of the southeast. The prevailing winds blow from the west. If the winds are mild and come from this direction you will actually be carried by the wind as you return to Redondo Beach. This is another reason why it is best to park at the Pier. If you park near the Santa Monica Pier and make the return loop riding into the prevailing winds the ride can become quite unenjoyable.

Upon arrival back at the pier, the many restaurants and informal snack bars offer tasty treats prior to departing for home. Depending on the number of stops you plan to make, this activity should be scheduled as an all day trip of no less than five hours riding time. There are numerous restrooms along the path, and drinking fountains are also plentiful.

Red's Meadow Mary Lake Backpacking Loop

The Red's Meadow Mary Lake loop is an excellent trail for a beginning backpack experience. The daily mileage is low. Though water will need to be treated for purification, it is readily available. The scenery is beautiful. The layover day at Fish Creek Hot Springs is an extra added delight.

This trip should not be attempted unless the group leader has had previous experience backpacking, though the route lends itself well to first time campers. Plan to spend six days and five nights on the trail, with a night before and after spent in a nearby drive-in campground. Adequate menu planning prior to leaving home is essential. The Devil's Postpile and Mt. Morrison topographical maps details the area this loop covers.

The best place to begin this loop is from the Red's Meadow trailhead. This area can be accessed from the Devil's Postpile National Monument access road west of Mammoth. Travel on this road is restricted during the hours of 8am - 6pm to reduce the impact on the environment in the Devil's Postpile area. The best way to insure easy and necessary access to the trailhead is to spend your first night in the drive-in state campground just north of the highway leading into Mammoth, behind the fire station. Or you can stay at one of the group use campgrounds near the Devil's Postpile area in the valley floor if you have made early reservations. You should begin to build community and do your food and equipment distribution there.

The first night together needs to be well planned. The style of leadership, intentionality of program input, and the level of organization for the rest of the trip will be established this first night. The group will expect the first night to be an indicator of what is to follow. Your time on the trail will go much better if you treat this first night as the beginning of your adventure together.

During this first evening, much of your time and energy will be spent making sure that equipment and food are adequate for the trip. Be sure you are well prepared. Once you enter the wilderness your resources become quite limited.

Make sure you determine that your supplies match your needs.

But don't spend the entire evening checking gear. The first night is the best time to establish expectations concerning community development. Assert yourself as the leader and be clear about your expectations of how the group will function. Though you should be open to feedback from the youth, it is important that you have the opportunity to set the context for what follows. Be clear about the route you will take and the style of the trip. Once you have shared your expectations and the group has had the opportunity to respond, have the group go to bed for the night. That will help insure the group is rested for the first day, and it will be another way that you give direction to the trip.

If you did not spend the night in the canyon, enter the controlled area in your vehicle early in the morning, via the Minnaret Summit gate. If you pass through this gate before 8 a.m., you will be allowed to drive through the valley floor for the remainder of the day as long as you don't return from the valley floor and travel back through the gate before 6pm that evening. If you do pass back through the gate, you must wait until after 6 p.m. before reentering the valley area.

Trailhead parking is available near the Red's Meadow Pack Station and Store. From there the trail heads due south toward Rainbow Falls. The mileage for this first day is very minimal, so you do not need to be rushed. Take adequate time at the trailhead to insure that gear is properly stowed and that the group is beginning to function as a group. The precedents that are set now will stand for the rest of the trip, regardless of whether they are positive or negative.

Your group will not be ready to leave all at the same time. There are always a few last minute adjustments that need to be made, even by the experienced campers and leaders. Require those who are ready earlier to wait until the entire group can depart. Do not allow a staggered start. Unless the group leaves together, you risk getting separated from each other on the various trails that merge close to the trailhead. You also defeat some of the community development you have worked at

establishing. Once every one has their pack on and is ready to begin, give a group prayer. Following the prayer designate the head and tail of the group. This is a helpful practice anytime you hike. No one should be allowed to go in front of the head or behind the tail, and the group should wait until everyone has gathered before crossing a junction.

About a mile down the trail you will come to Rainbow Falls. This is a good place to stop and check to see if everyone is doing okay. Spirits should be generally high. The distance will have been short and there will have been less than 100 feet elevation gain. Be sure to have the group check for signs of blisters on their feet. A blister later in the week can be painfully annoying to the entire group. If you catch a blister early it can be taken care of. This makes the trip easier for everyone.

Continuing south on the trail for approximately two miles past Rainbow Falls will bring you to the first day's campsite. There will be an open flat area just to the west, right, of the trail just before the trail crosses the creek for the first time. There should also be a National Forest sign near the crossing. This should be where your group has lunch. The afternoon can be devoted to some program activities and getting the campers used to the equipment they will be relying on.

The priority at this point in the trip should be building community. The afternoon program time should be focused on setting a context for the rest of the week. If you have the entire group focus on setting up the camp, they will need to function as a group. This provides a common goal and task, and gives the group something to do together as they continue what can be an awkward process of getting to know each other better. This also gives you an opportunity to gain a better idea of the experience level of the group as they set up camp.

You should not focus on community to the exclusion of pointing out ways to set up camp that leave no trace of the group after they have left. But the program work you will want to accomplish later in the week will be dependent on the group becoming a "group." Your program will accomplish less if the group identity is not

established. Your first priority should be building community. The rest of the experience is dependent on your success at doing that. Meal times can be utilized for this purpose, too. Be sure to be available for the meal preparation process. It will take the group a few meals before they fully understand some of the challenges of dehydrated food prepared over a outdoor stove. This is not a good time for the sink or swim approach. Having good food will assist the community process. Bad food can pull a group down.

Be sure to utilize the campfire time that evening for some reflection about becoming a group, and how God can be a part of that process. These reflections will often come from the group itself. Be sensitive to the comments that are made and follow up on them when possible. Remind the group that though they are in the wilderness, they are still a group that has formed in part around a common faith. The warmth of the fire and the security of the group in the advancing darkness of sunset can help calm apprehension of group members who might be frightened by this new environment. Having a less active evening time will help rest the group for the following day.

Day two will move the group about three miles further down the trail into Fish Valley. After dropping into the valley bottom you will cross a bridge onto the south side of the stream. There are a number of campsites up or down stream from this crossing within a couple hundred yards. This area previously served as a congregating place for Native American Indian tribes. You will be able to find large quantities of obsidian chips from the spearheads and arrowheads that were chipped out there. Again, you will have the afternoon for free time. The fishing is often good. You may want to continue intentional work with community development, or if the group seems to be forming well, you may want to allow the time to be used for the group to form relationship between individual members. A way to do this would be to encourage groups of two to four persons with similar interests to engage in a common activity.

A good place to start is to talk about what the group is feeling at that moment. The two mile grade that you just descended will be the most difficult part of the trail for the next two days, assuming you will take the suggested layover day during day four. It may be helpful to let the group know that they have accomplished the most difficult part of the first half of the trip. If you have persons who are physically hurting, this may give them a needed emotional boost. It should offer persons the opportunity to relax and think about other aspects of the trip they may not have been able to do because of a preoccupation with the uncertainty of the trail.

Humor can provide a comfortable access into sharing more significant feelings among group members. If something funny has happened, you may want to begin the time by sharing the experience with the group or having the person who had the experience share it with the group. This humor should not be at the expense of any member of the group. But, whether it be a funny comment or an odd mistake, humor is often helpful in inviting the group to share with each other.

Fish Valley will be the campsite where the group will really begin to feel that they have entered into the wilderness. The previous night's camp was only a few miles from the trailhead. With the additional mileage and the sense of being surrounded by the walls of the canyon that were descended earlier in the day, this camp offers the group a true wilderness experience. The group's sense of being in the wilderness could be discussed, with a focus on how the group may have to rely upon the community of the group more now that the wilderness has been entered.

If the group is rested and interested, have them leave the immediate area and isolate themselves from each other for 15 to 30 minutes. Make sure the group understands that they are not to go too far or walk around. Having natural barriers on two sides, this area is not an easy area to get lost in. Point out to the group that there is a trail that parallels the river and a huge bridge that can serve as a landmark. During the time the group is isolated, have them concentrate on different senses to

see what sounds, sights, and smells they can become aware of. A great time to do this would be after dinner as the sun is setting and the darkness of night is approaching.

While the group is spread out, the leader should return to camp and have a fire built. After giving a predetermined signal to call the group back to the camp, light the fire. The fire light will draw the group to the campsite and provide them some warmth and security, especially if the timing works well and darkness settles while there are away on this exercise. After debriefing the group's sensory experience, open the discussion to what they felt emotionally. Did they feel comfortable in the wilderness by themselves? Was the fire a warming community to return to? How does a person's need for others change when exploring the wilderness? This discussion can lead into a short campfire meditation concerning community. The group should not be kept up too late. With the level of physical exertion needed to backpack the group will need their sleep.

Day three will take you four miles west through Fish Valley to the Fish Creek Hot Springs where you will spend your fourth day as a layover day. There are a number of nice campsites near the hot springs. Choose your site well. You will be spending nearly 48 hours there. You may want to camp a short distance away from the hot springs so that you can have a bit more privacy.

The importance of having a midweek layover day is significant. Not only does it provide a physical break from hauling your pack, but it also gives an emotional break of knowing you don't have to keep moving. If you try to push through a week on the trail without a layover day, you run the risk of more severe physical and emotional difficulties later in the week. Take the insurance and spend a day soaking in the hot springs. You may also want to use your layover day to prepare the foods that take more time to cook. You have the time.

You will need to be sensitive to the need of the group to experience their layover day as truly a layover day. This time should not be used for extensive

programing. The group may want or need to spend some intentional time together for a specific purpose. But to provide a rest, group free time is essential. Also be aware that boredom may develop if group members cannot motivate themselves to be active on their own. If frustration appears, you may need to give the group a task to keep them busy. Due to the number of pack animals that travel through the area, there are a variety of trail repairs that could be attempted in the immediate area. No special tools would be required for this.

Another advantage of a layover day is the ability to do a nice day hike without the weight of a full pack. Some of the group may want to hike to a special area or to do some cross country exploring off the trail. If the physical condition of the group allows it, this kind of exploration should be encouraged. Such special trips, especially when initiated by the group, are often the part of the trip that is the most fondly remembered. This is where the youth can really get a feel for wilderness exploration.

After spending day four soaking, or fishing, or day hiking to Lost Keys Lake, day five should find you rested and ready to go again. The trail you will want to take heads north out of the hot springs area and climbs 600-700 feet up the ridge to the north. After reaching the summit of the ridge, the trail then continues west through Second Crossing and into Cascade Valley. This is one of the most beautiful parts of the loop. You will want to spend your fifth night in Cascade Valley near the junction of the Marsh Lake and Purple Lakes trails. The mileage for day five is 4-5 miles, with some altitude change. By this time your group should have developed its own rhythm. The group should also be able to direct itself and fulfill most of its own needs.

The evening of day five will be the beginning of your closing time together. This should be acknowledged by the group. The transition from wilderness to development, and from camp group back to families and friends, will need to be addressed this evening. The following night the group will no longer be isolated by themselves and will probably be camped in a public campground. This will impact

the way they relate to each other. If the conclusion of the experience is not initiated this evening, you may not be able to have a sufficient closing.

A good place to start this closing is to ask the group what it felt like to begin the trip five days before. Have the group discuss what has been the most fun for them on the trip as a way to bring out the positive experiences of the group. Ask the group what they learned about themselves, and the natural world. Begin to lead the group to theologize about the experience. Have the group search themselves about how this experience relates to their faith. Be prepared to lead the group in concluding the themes you introduced through the week. Make the time more of a sharing time than an evaluation.

If the time is well spent this evening, the next day will tend to be more of a celebration of what has happened rather than a time of expectation for what is yet to come. This is appropriate. The group has a day long opportunity to celebrate the conclusion of a week together. You may want to consider holding a special communion service this evening, or along the trail the next day. Because of the lack of control over the factors in a public campground, it is better to deal with the closing here than to wait until the next night when you have completed the trail. It is easy for the group to become focused on distraction rather than group concerns once they return to civilization.

Day six will be your longest day. It is also the day that you are best prepared for physically. The packs weigh less than they have weighed all week. The group has easily acclimatized to the 7,000 foot level. The soreness of the first few days has left. Go for it!

Day six will take you past Purple Lake, Duck Lake, Barney Lake, Red Lake, Skelton Lake and Arrowhead Lake to the trailhead at Mary Lake. If there is any doubt as to which direction you should walk this loop, look at the faces of the hikers you meet who are walking from Mary Lake to Duck Lake, and look back at the 10,600 foot summit and imagine walking up that on your first day with a full pack.

The total mileage for day six is about 12 miles. This may seem too long, but much of this distance is spent going downhill. After retrieving your car, or having someone meet you at the Mary Lake trailhead, you can eat your first “real meal” in a week in Mammoth and camp at one of the many campsites along the road back to Mammoth or back at the campground adjacent to Mammoth where you spent the night before the first trail day.

The evening of day six provides the group an excellent opportunity to celebrate the trip and finish program material in the comfort of the drive-in campground. You can rise early the next morning and be on your way home, having spent a week surrounded by some of the nicest areas the Sierra Nevadas offer.

California Coast Bike Tour

Most of the previous activity sites have been designed for hiking. This experience is included as an alternative to foot travel, allowing greater distances to be travelled each day while still transporting oneself under your own power. Though the leader of this excursion needs to have previous bike touring experience, the daily mileage is low enough that with pre-trip conditioning most every youth can make this trip on any well-functioning 10 speed bicycle. Parts of the route are quite narrow and windy. Special attention will need to be given to riders on how to establish themselves in a lane of traffic and how to avoid other riders and vehicles.

The views along this section of the California Coast are spectacular. The American Revolution Bicentennial Commission of California and CALTRANS have compiled an excellent map booklet of the entire route from the Oregon Border to the USA - Mexican border that describes many of the beautiful vistas you will travel along this route. This booklet is a necessary requirement for anyone planning this trip.

The comments that follow are geared mostly to the practicalities of bicycling this route. I have not concentrated much on program development. Most of the program area concerns have been covered in the previous “Red’s Meadow Mary

Lake Backpacking Loop” section, especially in terms of community building process. It will be helpful to read that material to better understand the group dynamics of a week-long trip.

It is important that you travel this route from north to south. The prevailing afternoon winds blow in this direction. Traveling against the wind, particularly if the weather is stormy, quickly dampens spirits and can ruin an otherwise well-planned trip. Also, I personally believe that the sights are better and that riders are more visible from the beach side of the road. It is much easier to view the cliffs and the hidden beaches from this lane.

This trip is suggested assuming that a vehicle will be travelling along with the group. This is important for a couple of reasons. First, one cannot predict with first time riders how they will handle the strains of bicycle touring, even at a basic 45 mile a day pace. A vehicle can help a rider before the strain becomes so great that the rider will have to sit out time during the following days of the ride. Second, having a vehicle to carry personal gear reduces the load that will need to be carried on each rider's bike, making the bike easier and safer to handle, reducing the amount of energy required to ride the bike, and allowing persons to bring some of the comforts of home that might have to be left behind if all gear was being carried on bikes. One of these comforts is good food. Because of the amount of energy that will be exerted, this is not a time to skimp on meals. An additional benefit is that the vehicle can arrive at the day's ending point and have a basic camp set up by the time riders begin arriving.

Because the trip lasts only five days, the daily mileage is generally low, and the support vehicle is travelling along with the group, a layover day is not necessarily recommended. The group will be arriving at the day's stopping point by noon on most days. This schedule will allow enough time to rest so that a full layover day may be unnecessary. If a layover day is desired, the ideal place would be Pfeiffer State Park in Big Sur.

You should plan to unload your bikes and spend the first night at the Pigeon Pt. Lighthouse youth hostel at Pescadero, about 45 miles south of San Francisco. This provides a good staging area to check equipment and do some group work. This hostel is a favorite among travelers, so you will want to make sure that you make a reservation. Kitchen facilities are available, so you can prepare your own evening meal and a good hearty breakfast the next day.

Your first day riding mileage will be 38 miles. This represents nearly six hours of travel time, but it shouldn't be rushed. The natural tendency of beginner riders is to push too hard too quickly, using up energy too fast and not thinking in terms of a more easily maintained consistent pace. If you can set a moderately slow pace this first day, the group will tend to follow that pace the rest of the week. The first ten miles are mostly rolling hills with little elevation change. As you cross the county line into Santa Cruz County you will encounter your first hill, a two mile grade gaining 200 feet. This is not a significant grade. There are much worse hills yet to come. If anyone has significant problems making this first hill, that person should be watched closely for the rest of the day and serious consideration should be given as to whether the person should be allowed to continue.

The town of Davenport makes a good lunch stop. If you are lucky, the fresh fruit stand will be open. If you don't know yet, you will soon discover what bicycle touring does to an appetite. From Davenport it is about 20 miles to New Brighton State Beach Campground near Capitola. Reservations are available and encouraged. The campground does have showers.

The second day mileage is 50. Except for some moderate hills for the first 10 miles, the route is predictably flat. Day two's destination is the city of Monterey. There is no conveniently located campground near Monterey, though a youth hostel has been set up during the summer months during recent years. Motel lodging is prohibitively expensive. If you are affiliated with a church, you may investigate whether a church of your denomination is located in Monterey. Most churches are

willing to allow groups to sleep on the floor of a fellowship hall. If this is your choice, be sure to clean properly upon your departure to insure that later groups will be extended the same courtesy you were.

Monterey is an interesting town to explore. Also, a number of restaurants and pizza parlors are available to fill a group's appetite. Eating out this second day may provide you with a nice change in pace and the ability to enjoy the unique sights of Cannery Row. You can also have a good break for tired muscles if you leave the bikes secured at your lodging for the night and shuttle the group with the support van. This isn't really experiencing the out-of-doors, but Monterey is not the wilderness. Enjoy the area.

Leaving Monterey on day three, you will encounter the first of two moderate hills. Both of these inclines gain nearly 500 feet in about a mile and a half. Traveling up is not your only concern. Both descents are quite steep, and though you will have longer descents on day four they will not be any steeper than these two. It is a good idea to have riders agree to stop at the bottoms of these two hills and gather as a group to make sure everyone made it. The total mileage is 32 miles, and you should arrive at Pfeiffer State Park in Big Sur in early afternoon. Again, reservations are suggested. There are showers and cleaning facilities at the campground.

Day four will be your most demanding day of riding. The previous three days of riding should have loosened up the riders. Day four will be the toughest day of the trip.

Upon leaving the campground, you will begin a two mile climb of over 700 feet. This will be the steepest climb of the trip. Once the summit is reached the next ten miles is up and down with short hills of 100-200 feet changes. Mile 15 begins the longest incline you will make. Just past John Little State Reserve you will begin an eight mile upgrade averaging over 50 feet a mile. This will be your longest climb of the trip. The elevation gain is not as difficult as is the distance of the constant grade.

Encourage riders to stop and take a break. Though riders' egos may not agree, there are no additional points awarded for making the hill without stopping. It will be especially important that food and fluid intake be maintained during this part of the route. When you arrive at the campground at Plaskett Creek State Park late that afternoon, approximately 40 miles later, you will know that you have accomplished something.

Leaving Plaskett Creek on day five you will encounter a couple of major inclines in the first 15 miles. Once you've crossed the San Luis Obispo County line you have one long, three-mile downgrade followed by 40 miles of gradual rolling hills. The distance is the longest distance on the trip, 62 miles. The wind can be difficult during the afternoon ride. You will want to make sure you get as early as start as possible.

Your riding for the day will be complete when you arrive at Morro Bay State Park. Reservations are suggested. The campground has showers. Having the group eat at a restaurant in Morro Bay would be a special treat. Group closing should take place later that evening.

Depending on your travel arrangements, the group should head home the following morning. It is best to have the evening of day five to complete the trip as a group. There will be much less of a bond between the riders without this opportunity to talk about the ride, discuss the highs and lows of the trip, and spend some closing time together. If the leader would like to plan to extend this trip one extra day, Montana de Oro State Campground is situated about 15 miles south of Morro Bay along a very scenic drive through a variety of coastal vegetation. The campground has water, and uses pit toilets. There are no showers available.

Conclusion

These six activity sites have been offered to assist you in the formulation of your own plans. You are reminded to research the trail and program guides listed in Appendix A for additional information. My most sincere hope is that the activities I

have described above allow you and your group to experience the Creator in the out-of-doors, and that out of that experience, you come to realize how full is God's love and the gift of God's amazing grace.

APPENDIX A

Trail Guides and Program Resources

- Benson, Dennis C., and Bill Wolfe. The Basic Encyclopedia for Youth Ministry. Loveland, Colo: Group Books, 1981.
- Bergon, Frank, ed. The Wilderness Reader. New York: New American Library, 1980.
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- Van Matre, Steve. Acclimatization. Martinsville, Ind: American Camping Association, 1972
- Van Metre, Steve. Acclimatizing. Martinsville, Ind: American Camping Association, 1974.
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- Witt, Ted R. Responsible with Creation. Atlanta: John Knox, 1979.

APPENDIX B

HEALTH QUESTIONNAIRE/PERMISSION FORM

_____/_____/_____
 (Name of youth) (Age) (Date of birth)

 (Adult to be contacted for emergency) (Relationship)

 (Address of adult)

()

 (Home Ph # of adult)

()

 (Business ph # of adult)

 (Youth's doctor's name)

 (Doctor's address and phone #)

Medical Insurance Co. _____

Account/Policy Number _____

(Yes) (No)

_____ Is youth under medical care? If so, for what?

_____ Will youth bring any medicine to activities? If so, What?

_____ Is youth allergic to any medicines? If so, what?

_____ Does youth suffer from heart of other condition which will
 limit youth's activities? If so, what?

Date of last tetanus shot _____

(on opposite side page of health questions)

AUTHORIZATION FOR CONSENT TO TREATMENT OF MINORS

I hereby give my permission for _____
to attend regularly scheduled meetings and activities of (name of church). While attending or traveling to and from meetings or special activities, I hereby authorize the Church Leader, or in his/her absence or disability, any adult accompanying or assigned by him/her, to consent to any X-ray examination, anesthetic, medical or surgical diagnosis or treatment and hospital care which is deemed advisable by, and is to be rendered under the general or special supervision of a physician, or to consent to an X-ray examination, anesthetic, dental or surgical diagnosis or treatment and hospital care to be rendered to said minor by a Dentist.

This authorization shall remain effective until such time as I withdraw my child, in writing, from participation with (name of church) activities. If any information listed on this form changes, I assume responsibility to inform the Church Leader of such changes.

(Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian)

(Date)

APPENDIX C

EMERGENCY RESCUE INFORMATION

Emergency Responder(s) to be contacted in case of emergency: (Search and Rescue Team, USFS, Sheriff, State Police, etc.)

(Name) (Ph #)

(Name) (Ph #)

(Name) (Ph #)

(Name) (Ph #)

(name of lost/injured)

(age) ____/____/____
(Date of birth)

If a minor, is there an authorization for treatment?

Yes _____ No _____

(location/last seen)

(clothing/gear)

IF INJURED...

Describe the injury. _____

Describe how did the injury occur. _____

When did injury occur? _____

Describe the condition of the injured. _____

Describe treatment given so far. _____

APPENDIX D

Publicity Checklist

Compare this list with your publicity material to determine if your publicity has all the necessary information for your activity.

What is the date(s) of the activity. _____

What are the times. _____

Where will the group meet. _____

When will the group need to arrive at the meeting place _____

When will the group leave the meeting place. _____

What should be brought (food, money, special equipment, swimsuits, boots, hat).

What should not be brought. _____

In case the youth must be contacted, who is listed as contact person while the group is away. _____

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